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ABSTRACT

This guide is a compilation of stories from early childhood educators throughout the state of Indiana and selected articles from research and experts in the field to assist Indiana educators in designing effective curricula, instruction, and assessment for children from preschool through third grade. The focus of the guide is developmentally appropriate education, and its intent is to act as a companion to the Indiana Academic Standards. Following an introduction, the guide is presented in nine sections: (1) "Role of the Teacher"; (2) "Role of the Instructional Assistant"; (3) "Partnerships with Families"; (4) "Role of the Administrative Staff"; (5) "The Learning Environment"; (6) "Classroom Climate and Daily Schedules"; (7) "Diversity"; (8) "Creating and Implementing Curriculum"; and (9) "Assessment and Evaluation." Each section is prefaced by stories from Indiana teachers and concludes with references and resource lists. (KB)

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# Teaching & Learning in the Critical Early Years: Preschool Through Third Grade

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# TEACHING & LEARNING

## In The Critical Early Years: Preschool Through Third Grade

Indiana Department of Education - Division of Prime Time

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STATE of INDIANA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
DR. SUELLEN REED, SUPERINTENDENT

INDIANAPOLIS 46204-2798

ROOM 229 · STATE HOUSE
AREA CODE 317-232-6665

November 2000

Dear Educator:

*Teaching and Learning in the Critical Early Years: Preschool Through Third Grade* is a compilation of stories from early childhood educators throughout the state of Indiana. Contained within are examples of real children doing meaningful and appropriate learning activities in Indiana classrooms, as well as selected articles from research and experts in the field. The purpose of this guide is to assist Indiana educators in designing effective curricula, instruction, and assessment for all children.

In its early stages, the guide was intended to be a kindergarten curriculum. It soon became clear that the information received was too rich in content to limit it to only one grade level. The focus shifted from specific curriculum, only, to a guide that can serve as a companion to Indiana's content area standards. It explores the importance of meaningful and contextually relevant curricula and instruction for all students from preschool through Grade 3. It profiles the roles that early childhood teachers, assistants, administrators, and parents have in this process.

The guide committee members (listed on page ii) represent many years of experience in early childhood education. They gave willingly of their time and effort in reviewing, compiling, and editing the guide. We owe them a debt of gratitude for the fine product they have assembled. I believe it will be used over and over by the educators for whom it is intended, and it will enhance the achievement of our youngest students.

Sincerely,

Dr. Suellen Reed

Dr. Suellen Reed
Superintendent of
Public Instruction

# Teaching and Learning In the Critical Early Years: Preschool Through Third Grade

Indiana Department of Education
Room 229, State House
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204-2798
Division of PRIME TIME

# Teaching and Learning in the Critical Early Years: Preschool Through Third Grade

*Committee Members*

Robert Burke, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Ball State University
Muncie, IN

Kay Cahill
Primary Multi-age Teacher
Riley Elementary
Riley, IN

Cindy Creek
Primary Multi-age Teacher
Rogers Elementary
Bloomington, IN

Brenda Day
Kindergarten Inclusion Support Teacher
Indianapolis Public Schools
Indianapolis, IN

Jayma Ferguson
Education Consultant
Indiana Department of Education
Indianapolis, IN

Ruth Hanna
Second Grade Teacher
Central Elementary
Martinsville, IN

Susan Jaggers
Preschool Teacher
Southern Heights Elementary
Fort Wayne, IN

Susan Julian
Kindergarten Teacher
Hazel Dell Elementary
Noblesville, IN

Karen Kirby
First Grade Teacher
Hazel Dell Elementary
Noblesville, IN

Marolyn Krauss
Third Grade Teacher
Horizon Elementary
Granger, IN

Becky Lane
Principal
Whiteland Elementary
Whiteland, IN

Mary Beth Morgan
Director of Children's Ministries
First United Methodist Church
Bloomington, IN

Glenna Myers
Third Grade Teacher
Meadow's Edge Elementary
Mishawaka, IN

Denise Ogren
Kindergarten Teacher
Edgewood Early Childhood Center
Ellettsville, IN

Marlane Tisdale
Retired Kindergarten Teacher
Lakeside Elementary School
Indianapolis, IN

Trish Weis
Director of Title One/Early Childhood
Anderson Community School Corporation
Anderson, IN

*This list represents the current professional positions held by members of the committee. Articles and stories are listed with the positions held at the time the pieces were written.*

The committee wishes to thank Jenny Forbes and Laura Taylor for helping to edit this document.

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*The Preschool and Primary Years are....*

*"...the crucial early years of education, when children gain the essential skills, knowledge, and dispositions critical to later school success."*

Tom Shultz & Joan Lombardi
"Right From the Start"
(*Young Children,* January, 1989)

# We Are Responsible

*Ina Hughes*

*We are responsible for children*
*who put chocolate fingers everywhere,*
*who like to be tickled,*
*who stomp in puddles and ruin their pants,*
*who sneak popsicles before supper,*
*who erase holes in math workbooks,*
*who can never find their shoes.*

*And we are responsible for those*
*who stare at photographers from behind barbed wire,*
*who can't bound down the street in a new pair of sneakers,*
*who never "counted potatoes,"*
*who are born in places we wouldn't be caught dead,*
*who never go to the circus,*
*who live in an x-rated world.*

*We are responsible for children*
*who give us sticky kisses and fistfuls of dandelions,*
*who sleep with the dog and bury goldfish,*
*who hug us in a hurry and forget their lunch money,*
*who cover themselves with Band-aids and sing off-key,*
*who squeeze toothpaste all over the sink,*
*who slurp their soup.*

*And we are responsible for those*
*who never get dessert,*
*who have no safe blanket to drag behind them,*
*who watch their parents watch them die,*
*who can't find any bread to steal,*
*who don't have any rooms to clean up,*
*whose pictures aren't on anybody's dresser,*
*whose monsters are real.*

*We are responsible for children*
*who spend all their allowance before Tuesday,*
*who throw tantrums in the grocery store and pick at their food,*
*who like ghost stories,*
*who shove dirty clothes under the bed and never rinse the tub,*
*who get visits from the tooth fairy,*
*who don't like to be kissed in front of the carpool,*
*who squirm in church and scream in the phone,*
*whose tears we sometimes laugh at*
*and whose smiles can make us cry.*

*And we are responsible for those*
*whose nightmares come in the daytime,*
*who will eat anything,*
*who have never seen a dentist,*
*who aren't spoiled by anybody,*
*who go to bed hungry and cry themselves to sleep,*
*who live and move, but have no being.*

*We are responsible for children*
*who want to be carried,*
*and for those who must;*
*for those we never give up on*
*and for those who don't get a second chance;*
*for those we smother . . .*
*and for those who will grab the hand of anybody*
*kind enough to offer it.*

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# INTRODUCTION

There was a child went forth every day,
And that first object he look'd upon, that object he became,
And that object became a part of him for the day,
or a certain part of the day,
or for many years, or stretching cycles of years.

Walt Whitman
"There Was a Child Went Forth"
in Leaves of Grass (1860)

# Kathy Politz

## *Indiana Teacher of the Year 2000*

Excerpt from Ms. Politz's acceptance speech at the
Indiana Teacher of the Year 200 banquet, November 3, 1999, Indianapolis, IN.
(Reprinted by permission)

As I reflect back, I know I was destined to be a teacher. I grew up in a home with two teachers: teachers who took pride in their chosen profession and faced each teaching day with a positive attitude and a desire to guide each child to his or her potential. I saw firsthand the challenges, the responsibilities, and the joys of teaching. From an early age, I explored the halls of schools, investigated classrooms, and sat behind teachers' desks. I fondly remember sliding down the banister at Butler University while my mother attended night classes, and my father graded papers in the cafeteria. I often gathered neighborhood children to play school. Try to guess who was always the teacher? Forty-one years later I am no longer playing teacher. I am a teacher - one of many professional, dedicated individuals.

Education is alive and well, and school teachers are making a difference. Each day teachers create and prepare learning environments that are simulating, thought provoking, nurturing, and safe. Teachers create learning environments that take children to the edge of their understanding. Each day teachers support and engage children in a community of learners. Yet, all of us know this is not enough. The expected tasks for teachers and schools today are many and varied. Schools are often criticized for not meeting a desired level of performance. *In all of this chastisement, educators must not lose sight of the fact that schools must exist for each and every child.*

Educating a child must be a team effort. Robert Fulghum confirms this thought in his book, Everything I Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten: Uncommon Thoughts on Common Things (1988), ". . . And it is still true, no matter how old you are - when you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together." Teachers must have the help and support of all concerned in order to meet each child's needs. Education is like a wheel with many spokes. Spokes that represent teachers, administrators, government agencies, institutions of higher learning, families, students, and communities. If one spoke is not functioning, the wheel will not perform well.

As we enter the new millennium, all of us are thinking and speaking about the uncertainties as well as the excitement we will face in the future. We are in a state of constant struggle with technology and the media in gaining and retaining the attention of our youth. This competition makes being more creative and knowledgeable about our children and our world more challenging and more important than ever. While technology has brought many wonderful advancements to children's lives, I am their constant. I am their hugger, their reflective listener, and their protector. Who knows? I may have held the hand of a future President or tied the shoes of the next Larry Bird!

In closing, I leave you with these words commonly attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson:

**To laugh often and much;**
**To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children;**
**To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends;**
**To appreciate beauty, to find the best in others;**
**To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition;**
**To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived.**
**This is to have succeeded.**

# TEACHING AND LEARNING

## *In the Critical Early Years: Preschool Through Third Grade*

The focus of this guide is developmentally appropriate education for Indiana's preschool through third grade children. It is vitally important that children have learning experiences that are appropriate and are based upon current knowledge and research of child development and learning; the strengths, needs, and interests of each individual child; and the social and cultural context in which each child lives.

***Teaching and Learning in the Critical Early Years* is not a curriculum guide but can act as a companion to the content area standards.** The Indiana Academic Standards are developed by individuals with expertise in each specialized area, including many Indiana educators. They are based on the latest national research and findings from each content area. They outline specific skills and concepts and give examples of instructional strategies. The standards assist educators as they develop curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This guide is designed to assist educators in approaching these areas from a developmentally appropriate perspective.

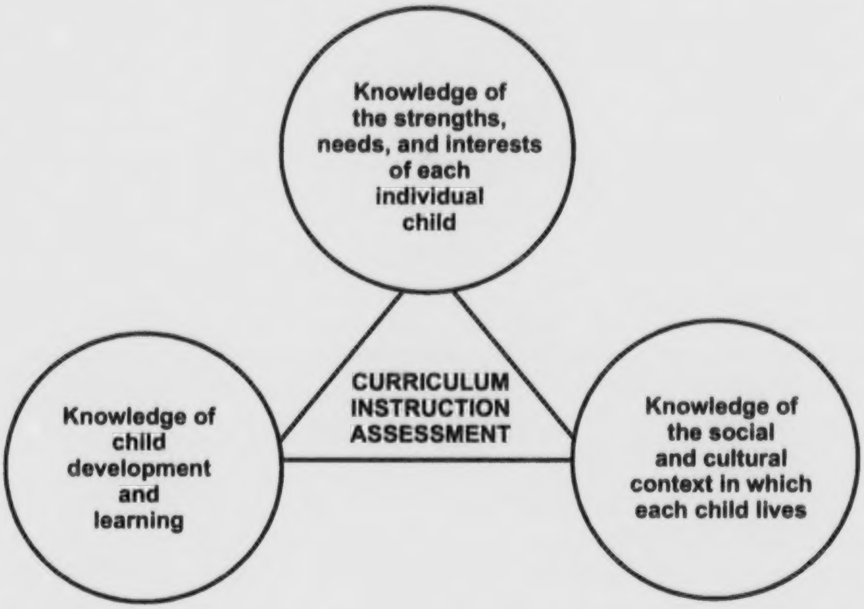
In 1986 and 1987, the National Association for the Education of Young Children published position statements and guidelines regarding developmentally appropriate practice. These guidelines were developed, partially, as a response to a growing trend toward more formal, academic instruction of young children (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

"At that time, many (schools) were placing undue emphasis on rote learning and whole group instruction of narrowly defined academic skills, at the expense of more active learning approaches based on a broader interpretation of children's educational needs and abilities. Testing, placement, and retention practices also raised serious concerns (NAEYC, 1988; Bredekamp and Shepard, 1989) . . . . These trends were quite evident in kindergartens and primary grades where next grade expectations were imposed on earlier grades regardless of children's interests, needs, and competencies . . . . On the basis of these concerns, guidelines were adopted for developmentally appropriate practice. The primary position was that programs designed ***for*** young children be based on what is known ***about*** young children. The guidelines also reflected a clear commitment regarding the rights of young children to respectful and supportive learning environments and to an education that would prepare them for participation in a free and democratic society" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. v).

Many national education organizations have taken positions on early childhood education. These include the National Association of State Boards of Education, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education. They have examined early childhood issues and are providing guidance to their members of the components of effective, high quality programs for children.

*"The primary position was that programs designed* **for** *young children be based on what is known* **about** *young children."*

*Developmentally appropriate practice*
*can be defined as an outgrowth of the professional making decisions*
*based on at least three important kinds of knowledge and information:*


Knowledge of the strengths, needs, and interests of each individual child
CURRICULUM
INSTRUCTION
ASSESSMENT
Knowledge of child development and learning
Knowledge of the social and cultural context in which each child lives

The early childhood professional can make decisions concerning curriculum, instruction, and assessment only after addressing the three essential areas of information and knowledge.

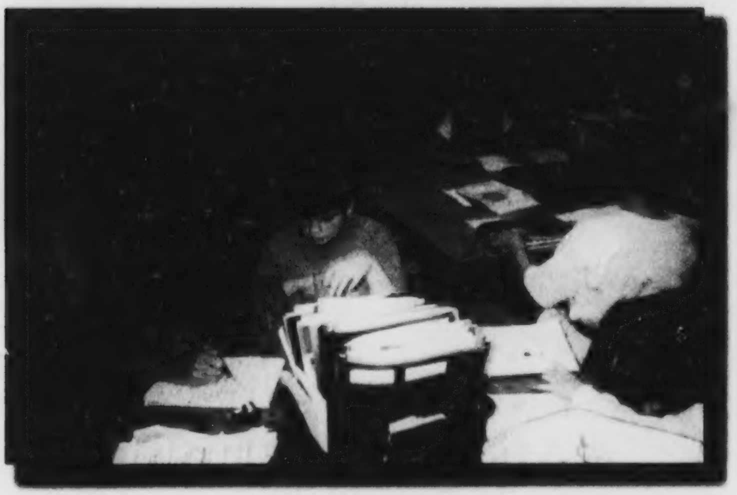
It is the intent of this guide to be user friendly. Each section is prefaced by **real stories from real teachers in Indiana.** The guide contains many examples of **real children** doing meaningful, appropriate learning activities in Indiana classrooms.

Throughout the guide you will find information and research pages from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and ERIC that might be pertinent to issues in your schools and districts. It is the hope of the writers that you will distribute copies of these sheets to parents, educators, school boards, legislators, etc. to inform and educate them on best practices for children.

## Reference

Bredekamp, S. & Copple, C. (Eds.) (1997). *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs.* Washington, DC: NAEYC.

# ROLE OF THE TEACHER



*"The primary goal of education is to create people who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done—people who are creative, inventive, and discoverers."*

*Piaget*

# ROLE OF THE TEACHER

In this chapter, the important role of the teacher as a learner in the classroom is examined. You will find articles from teachers, parents, and professional journals and organizations. This chapter is divided into the following sections:

## I. Role of the Teacher as a Learner

- ☐ Teacher Story: *My Growth as a Teacher* by Karen Kirby
- ☐ Teacher Story: *The Role of the Teacher in Collaboration* by Becky Lane
- ☐ *My Transition from Conventional to More Developmentally Appropriate Practices in the Primary Grades* by Jim Pelander
- ☐ Parent Story: *Jacob's Story*
- ☐ *Eleven Ways to be a Great Teacher* by Donald Wesley

## II. Role of the Teacher in the Classroom

- ☐ Teacher Story: *A Learner-Centered Classroom* by Marolyn Krauss and Glenna Myers
- ☐ Role of the Teacher in the Classroom
- ☐ *Shine up Your Face: First Graders Evaluate their Teacher's Response* by Maggie Donovan
- ☐ Dialogue (Teacher Self Reflection) by Lois Bridges
- ☐ When you Leave . . . Ask Yourself
- ☐ Organizations and Associations

## III. Role of the Teacher References and Resources

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# I. Role of the Teacher as a Learner

## My Growth as a Teacher

*Karen Kirby*
*Hazel Dell Elementary, Noblesville*

**Teacher Story**

***If Once You Have Slept on an Island***

If once you have slept on an island
You'll never be quite the same;
You may look as you looked the day before
And go by the same old name,

You may bustle about in street and shop;
You may sit at home and sew,
But you'll see blue water and wheeling gulls
Wherever your feet may go.

You may chat with the neighbors of this and that
And close to your fire keep,
But you'll hear ship whistle and lighthouse bell
And tides beat through your sleep.

Oh, you won't know why, and can't say how
Such change upon you came,
But—once you have slept on an island
You'll never be quite the same!

*Rachel Field*

This poem by Rachel Field makes me think about my beloved island of Nantucket. It also makes me think about my experiences as a kindergarten and first grade teacher over the past 26 years. These years have been filled with experiences that have kept me learning and growing and changing. Once I read about developmentally appropriate practices, heard about new research on how children learn best, and saw the effectiveness of these approaches in my own classroom, I could not go back to my former way of teaching.

This is my story. In 1971, I graduated from Purdue University with a degree in child development and family life. Though I had learned to teach in a way that was developmentally appropriate, it was not called that. I began my first job teaching kindergarten. I was given math and reading readiness workbooks and the teacher's manuals and told this is what I should use. Over the years, I followed the examples of my fellow teachers and divided my students into ability groups to do the workbooks. We all believed we were doing what was best, and it was what "everyone" was doing.

Then one day, along came some new teachers with some new ideas. The first thing I thought was, "What do they know?" I have all the experience! But as I listened and watched, and fortunately I did listen and watch, a great change began to come about for me professionally. However, it didn't happen all at once. In fact, I spent two years just questioning what they were saying and doing from every possible angle. It completely shook up my world and everything I believed about my teaching.

I have come to view this period as the renaissance or reformation of my teaching career. I began to find out for myself. I joined NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) and got their journal, *Young Children*. I started to read. Then, I started to try some things. I took some more college classes. One thing led to another. My classroom began a slow transformation. I used to decorate the room with commercially made posters, borders, and pre-cut lettering. I stored all the materials neatly in my closet. Now, I start the year with the furniture in place and the walls bare. All the materials are at children's fingertips. Everything in the room is a tool for children's work or a product of the children's work. Even our reference alphabet on the wall is made by the children.

I learned that change is a process that does not happen all at once. I came to recognize that there were a lot of things I had already been doing that were consistent with developmentally appropriate practice. I have received support for my work by establishing partnerships with other teachers who are learning and growing. The children who believe themselves to be readers, writers, and mathematicians while they are becoming readers, writers, and mathematicians, inspire me to continue. I know now that I am involved in a fluid process of growth that will never end.

**Teacher Story**

# THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN COLLABORATION

*Becky Lane*
*Center for Inquiry, Indianapolis Public Schools*

Collaboration! Just another of today's educational buzzwords or a solid idea that's here to stay? After working with a group of teachers the past six years, I know I will never work in isolation again. We meet twice a week to discuss curriculum and to share ideas. We each get stronger from the strengths of our partners. The dreamers keep us moving forward and looking at all the possibilities. The detail person makes sure we don't forget anything. The whole-picture person helps us check to be certain that our plans fit our goals and beliefs and, if not, pushes us to decide which should be changed. Our philosopher often will sit quietly until near the end of the discussion but then adds some piece of wisdom that the rest of us overlooked.

Does everything always run smoothly? Of course not! With that many diverse personalities, there are bound to be disagreements, but we are all working for a common goal. We are willing to put the good of the group before the good of the individual, and we are better for it. The students benefit from better planned lessons and a greater variety of ideas. Students also need to see that collaboration isn't just for teachers. We set up situations for students to collaborate, and they also learn to respect each other's views and value the diversity.

# MY TRANSITION FROM CONVENTIONAL TO MORE DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES IN THE PRIMARY GRADES

*Jim Pelander*
*Charles Wright Academy*
*Tacoma, Washington*

(Original article published in *Young Children*, 52(7), 1997, p. 19-25.
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Having taught primary-age children for 20 years, I felt very confident and competent in my profession; but with my recent awareness and implementation of developmentally appropriate practices, I often feel like an overwhelmed first-year teacher. Surprisingly, though, I am thoroughly enjoying the developmental approach if solely for the effects I see these practices having on children.

For 12 years I taught first-graders in both public- and private-school settings using the traditional or conventional approach. During the first two years of teaching third-graders, I also employed the traditional approach. However, I have since moved to more developmentally appropriate practices. But it didn't happen overnight.

I first encountered the term "developmentally appropriate practice" in a written evaluation of our primary grades suggesting that the children be given more opportunities for movement and mentioning NAEYC as a resource. My initial reaction was defensive, and it ultimately lasted another two years. My written response to the evaluator's suggestion was that primary students *do* get a great deal of movement during the day—at recess and going to and from different "specials" (art, music, physical education, French). I chuckle at my response now, but it is a good indication of how uninformed I was regarding developmental theory.

I now understand the evaluator's suggestion that the children have more opportunity for movement to mean that children be able to move about the classroom to work on activities at different centers and periodically sit at areas other than their tables.

As I began reading and hearing more about developmentally appropriate practice, feelings of frustration and fear surfaced. I felt a need to defend the traditional approach in which I was taught and trained—drill and practice, teacher direction, control. It had surely worked for me: I saw the results every day. My measure of success was the pile of dittos and workbook pages I corrected daily. It was rewarding seeing those mountains of paper as I would leave for home.

This "other" approach seemed too flowery for me—like the "open" concepts of the '70s. I spent hour upon hour arguing with my sister, an early childhood consultant, giving reasons why developmentally appropriate practice wouldn't work. Her final question: "What's the worst that could happen if you tried implementing some of the developmentally appropriate practice theory?" I responded that if it didn't work, I supposed I could always go back to the traditional approach. Her joking retort: "Perhaps the worst that could happen is that you'd like it!"

### My first major change—
### Doing away with ability grouping in reading

Just as children are on a continuum in the development of their learning, so too there is a continuum in teachers' learning, accepting, and implementing developmentally appropriate practice.

My first major change was doing away with ability grouping in reading. This was difficult, but my foundation in traditional approaches to skills was helpful. The challenge was figuring out how to develop these skills in students in a meaningful way. This was very laborious because it involved more mental planning than did the traditional approach.

For example, when children work together, perform skits, sing, or construct dioramas, learning vocabulary and developing comprehension skills become more interesting and enjoyable. Or by centering academic work around an overnight trip to the ocean, we are able to apply writing, spelling, social studies, math, science, and reading concepts to a tangible experience.

Children have various opportunities to read—in large group mini-lessons and for pleasure. Each day all the children in the school have a 20-minute block of time to read independently material of their choice. The principal initiated this practice, and all faculty, staff, and students participate.

Reflecting on my former approach—reading groups—I can see that the children had more instruction in reading than actual application of reading, and the choice of material was always mine. Even with all my teaching experience, I was either unaware or chose not to accept that young children can get excited about reading when going through a phone directory, a joke book, or even the riddles on the inside of a candy wrapper.

During the week I listen to as many children as possible reading individually, usually three or four each morning. They may read from a book of their choice or from a literature book the class is reading. When I work with individuals, we concentrate on reading with inflection and decoding unfamiliar words from context and phonetic clues. Students also orally retell passages from their reading, either from memory or by looking back through the book.

In the last eight years, I find myself teaching isolated reading skills less than I did in my first 12 years as a primary teacher—particularly when children come across unfamiliar words. I find that, when given an opportunity to brainstorm and share with classmates their own strategies for decoding unfamiliar words, children are just as successful as when they use formal strategies.

During the year children are involved in projects in which they choose topics they would like to report on or learn more about. They check out from the library reading materials on their topic and read them to me or another adult during individual reading time.

When reading from our class literature book, children with various levels of reading ability are grouped together at tables. Groups are assigned pages from each chapter and work collaboratively, selecting their own vocabulary words to work on and writing their own comprehension questions. Students can also draw pictures and make dioramas to reinforce their comprehension skills.

Compared to years past, my approach to reading now puts more emphasis on children selecting reading materials keyed to their interests and reading to me individually. I present skills informally as needed. Children also learn reading skills from each other when they work collaboratively in groups. When reading abilities vary, children have much to teach each other.

Educating parents about developmentally appropriate practice while I myself was learning about it was time consuming and even scary! Trying to implement developmentally appropriate practice and assess it at the same time was frustrating. And not having time to communicate with other colleagues to evaluate implementation was also frustrating—learning from each other can be as valuable to teachers as it is to children.

We recently moved to a team approach. This approach, promoted last year by the lower-school principal for all grade levels, involves working closely with a colleague—a teaching partner—toward common goals. My partner and I have had extensive discussions about implementing developmentally appropriate practice in our classrooms, and working together has alleviated much of the stress and anxiety I experienced when implementing developmental theory alone.

One of our first goals was for the third grade to be perceived by children, parents, and faculty as a single class taught by two teachers, even though there are two connecting classrooms separated by a wall. To promote this concept, we put both our names outside of each classroom; we made several home visits together; and when we spoke to parents, students, or faculty regarding events in our classrooms, we used *we* and *our* rather than *I* and *my*.

The children did a great job of conveying to parents the one-class concept. Notes normally addressed to one teacher frequently had both our names on them. The children themselves, who often communicate with us in writing, addressed their notes and letters to both of us. My partner and I know all the children and interact regularly with each regarding skills and progress. In addition to modeling a healthy working relationship, the team approach provides another set of "eyes" to assess children's progress. It has been enormously uplifting and has improved the quality of our program.

### My second major change—
### Giving children significant choices

It took some adjusting for me to allow children to share in decision making, have choices, and be in control of much of their learning. I see on a daily basis how this helps children develop self-esteem. Early in my teaching career, I felt that "self-esteem" was just another buzzword; but the more I read, the more I realized how important it is later in life. Every day we see in adults (even the most educated and successful ones) the effects of low self-esteem—drug use, alcoholism, and unhealthy relationships.

Children in our class make choices and decisions, plan, and are empowered or share control in various ways. Sometimes students choose where they will sit during the week; other times they are assigned seating. We have done away with desks in our classroom and have replaced them with tables to help reinforce the concept of community. During work periods, children have the choice of sitting at their table, on the floor, at a study carrel, or even in the library.

In the past when students first entered the room each day, they saw in a corner of the chalkboard a list of assignments to complete in sequential order during the morning (for example: 1. Phonics book, p. 18; 2. Cursive writing; 3. Spelling; 4. Math pages; 5. Reading workbook, p. 22). Obviously most children never finished!

We have abandoned the practice of listing directions and requiring work to be done in sequence or in one work period. Instead, our directions for the morning are written in a letter format, usually two or three paragraphs. We feel we are modeling writing, and at the same time the children are reading daily and learning to follow written directions. The letter format allows us to introduce and reinforce curricular skills and concepts for our grade. In addition, a letter is something the children can relate to and experience on a daily basis.

Children spend the first half hour of the morning working on academic assignments—mostly hands-on activities and games and some paper-and-pencil work. The materials are easily accessible in the writing, art, science, computer, math, reading, and social studies areas. Children have a menu of activities that they can do in any order they wish. In each area they are asked to complete some activities of their own choosing and others of mine. Assignments from our menus are due not in one period but rather in seven or eight periods.

At the end of the half hour, children spend 10 to 15 minutes writing in their journal about their activities or a subject of their choice. Their compositions offer an opportunity to work on writing development. Children have a choice of how to write-some print or use cursive, while others use the computer. Journal writings have yielded some wonderful poems and songs.

We encourage the children to communicate both verbally and in writing with each other and with us—especially if they encounter a problem, be it social or academic. Communication in writing rather than through conversation seems to be the route many choose. Notes range from a single sentence to a page long.

Sometimes a child's note requests a meeting among two children and a teacher to help solve a social problem. Often when a child makes a suggestion about solving a problem or looking into a topic (recycling, poetry, rules for games during recess), we ask that he or she form a committee.

A few years ago a student felt our cubbies needed a different type of hook—one that would more adequately hold our coats and backpacks. She was assigned to head a committee to research the issue. The eight-year-old chairperson met with her committee members, then she took the issue up with her parents.

Several days later our class received a business letter from a custom cabinet shop (the chairperson's father owned the business) offering to help. The result was that our class and one other became the recipients of new custom cabinets and carpeting. Full-length cubbies now provide sufficient space for all our materials!

While the teachers were the decision makers on the type of cabinetry, the students were involved in the color selection. This process included visiting the manufacturing site. The committee gathered color samples and the class voted on color schemes. We went with their selection, although the professionals toned it down somewhat—with the committees permission!

As part of our reading program, children have an opportunity to choose and research a topic they would like to learn more about. They make decisions regarding reading materials, learn to make a plan for their work periods, work collaboratively with a partner, and plan and make decisions about how to display and present the project.

Many interesting projects emerge. A student constructed a model of neutrons and atoms to represent nuclear fission. In addition he gave a report on the topic, developed math problems, and made graphs. Another student presented a project on gears. She constructed a five-foot-tall structure that included levers, pulleys, and a motor. When the motor was turned on, ping-pong balls went through a series of mazes.

The projects usually take a month to complete. The children then have a "project fair" at which parents and other classes can view the work and ask questions. The final step is an evaluation or reflection by each student on his or her project.

### Following children's progress

While other teachers and I continue to implement more child-sensitive practices in our classroom, I still respect the opinions and beliefs of colleagues and parents who may disagree with developmentally appropriate practice. Keeping data on former students has provided me with information I can share to help reinforce the use of the approach and minimize concerns regarding academic success.

In the past six years it has been interesting to follow the progress of students exposed to the traditional approach and those exposed to developmentally appropriate practice. My findings support the fact that learning is developmental. In most cases children who had difficulty academically in primary grades under the traditional system went on to receive good grades later. In this group what didn't change, though, were the teachers' comments about behavior of children with social difficulties.

In following the progress of six of the third-grade classes I taught using primarily developmentally appropriate practice, again most students received good marks later. However, children taught with developmentally appropriate practices, in addition to being comparable academically in later grades, had also acquired skills in working with others, problem solving, decision making, planning, organizing, and evaluating—skills they will use throughout life.

It's rewarding to see that developmentally appropriate practice fosters social skills in young children. I have found that these children continue to acquire basic skills and maintain a healthy disposition for learning. Based on my experiences using both approaches, I feel that developmentally appropriate practice addresses the development of self-esteem in children much more than does the traditional approach.

### Staying informed and sharing with colleagues

In implementing developmentally appropriate practice in the classroom, I have found it invaluable to continue reading and asking questions about developmentally appropriate theory, rationale, and research. It sounds time consuming, and it can be; but it has always been reaffirming. Sharing articles with colleagues and administrators is valuable as well.

### Informing parents

Keeping parents informed has proven very important; many were educated in a traditional system.

In early July my third-grade teaching partner and I send the curriculum to third-grade parents. We also ask parents to jot down on an index card and mail to us their goals for their child in the upcoming year. In the second week of school we meet with the parents one evening to explain the approaches their children will be exposed to—some traditional, most developmentally appropriate.

After introductory comments, parents can visit areas in the classroom where information about developmentally appropriate practice is set up—professional articles regarding developmentally appropriate practice, games and manipulatives that teach and reinforce basic skills, student projects from previous years, assessment tools to measure progress, reading program information, and an activity for parents that involves active learning. After 45 minutes parents come together to discuss and ask questions.

At this meeting parents can read a compilation of their goals for the children. It is interesting to note that most parental goals concern the children developing self-confidence and self-esteem, being happy, enjoying learning, learning to work together—all of which are addressed by developmentally appropriate practice. (Of course parents value academics, but the surveys have indicated that their educational goals and ours are very similar.)

After parents have asked questions, we show a professionally made video of former third-graders involved in class projects that demonstrate children developing "process skills"—research, planning, decision making, organizing, speaking, evaluating. Then the parent of a former third-grader presents a commentary reinforcing the positive aspects of developmentally appropriate practice.

This meeting sets the tone for the year as parents know what to expect and have a better understanding of how developmentally appropriate practice addresses the goals they have for their child.

This year, with the guidance of our principal, all teachers will participate in a curriculum night to explain and demonstrate our practices. Both our former and present principals have been instrumental in guiding and supporting teachers in the implementation of developmentally appropriate practice. Our first- and second-grade teachers are in the planning stages for multi-age classes. Our principal also conducts workshops for parents and faculty that include components of developmentally appropriate practice, circulates professional articles, and encourages faculty to attend outside workshops.

Before instituting parent meetings, I used to feel the need to explain and justify in weekly letters what we were doing in class and why. We still send home weekly letters, but now include articles about developmentally appropriate practice. We also encourage parents to send in educational articles for others to read, even if these will provoke controversy.

### Evaluating myself

I now measure my success as a teacher by my ability to facilitate, the number of choices I offer, and how meaningfully I impart cognitive skills—academic and everyday problem-solving skills—rather than by how many dittos and workbook pages I give and grade. I realize the results from this approach can't always be posted on the refrigerator like a paper with "100%" on it, but more important, developmentally appropriate practice helps lay the foundations for continued life-skills success.

**Parent Story**

# Jacob's Story

Every spring I go through the work my own kids have brought home from school. We look at everything, and I keep for the archives everything that is original and creative. When I went through all of Jacob's fifth grade stuff, I had one journal entry (they only got to do one all year) and one notebook of rough drafts of stories (no one ever published anything unless they did it at home). All of his science, social science, and health were notes copied into his workbook. His reading assignments were one chapter of a book followed by three pages of questions to answer in complete sentences. I couldn't believe this had gotten by me so completely, or that all year he had succumbed with so little complaint to the role of a mindless pencil in a lonely desk.

And this is Jacob, the dreamer, deep thinker, reader, writer, artist, and wonderfully candid soul who, when he was a five-year-old insomniac, wrote this poem:

> Night goes past like an earthworm,
> Night goes past like an earthworm,
> Stars are up above,
> And the moon is shining like a dove,
> Night goes past like an earthworm.

I gave him commiseration and a cookie.

It strikes me that teachers like this are like aliens at a birthday party. We give them twenty-odd of the best presents we can find. And they stack them, sort them, arrange them, display them, stick them full of stickers, and talk to them. But they never, ever open them. And so they never discover how beautiful and rich and rare our gifts are.

A toast to you teachers who know what to do with a present.

(Reprinted by permission. The author wishes to remain anonymous.)

# ELEVEN WAYS TO BE A GREAT TEACHER

1. **Empathize**. If you are not and never have been a student having trouble, a parent, an administrator, or the teacher next door, can you imagine what it must be like? Can you see yourself as the other? This is the beginning of understanding.

2. **Create partnerships with families, administrators, and other teachers.** It won't be easy. Partnerships of this kind meet resistance. They must be forged. Somebody has to keep trying. Decide that it will be you.

3. **Account to others.** Organize. Don't wing it. Be able to explain. Keep careful records. Know when things happened or didn't happen. Let the record show that you did your part; you tried. Don't get caught not knowing facts, dates, times, and numbers. Be convincing and thorough.

4. **Embrace adversity.** (This is also known as *Face the beast.*) Conflict, contention, failure, and fears are the experiences that teach us. To deal with adversity in others while maintaining respect and concern for them is an accomplishment.

5. **Practice the long view.** Consider the strategic consequences of tactical decisions. Your students will become adults. What will they say of you then? Were you real, honest, fair, and right? What students are today is not what they might become. Are you willing to treat them as if they can become something better, as if they are already on their way?

6. **Demonstrate competency and interest** not only in your subject specialty but in others as well. And help students become competent and interested.

7. **Never quit. Go the distance.** Keep believing in your students even when they are failing, disruptive, suspended, or thrown out. Believe in them when they do not believe in themselves. Draw the line, and do what you must, but be ready when your lesson finally takes hold—and *they* begin to believe.

8. **Accept responsibility** for doing the job to the best of your ability every day. Teach responsibility by being responsible.

9. **Reflect and contribute to reflection.** Read, think, write. Communicate your questions and ideas. Share with colleagues. Publish. Teaching is largely a thinking life—forward to a plan, backward to an evaluation. It is constant reflection.

10. **Admit mistakes and fix them** as soon as possible. Don't wait until tomorrow. Make fixing a top priority. It solidifies credibility. It keeps you humble. It teaches by example.

11. **Wait patiently, expectantly, and intensely** for your work to have an effect, for your students to succeed, for your reputation to grow, for your skills to sharpen, and for your alumni to let you know how you did.

(Courtesy of Donald Wesley, House Two Principal, Orchard Park High School, Orchard Park, NY, 1998)

# II. Role of the Teacher in the Classroom

**Teacher Story**

## A LEARNER-CENTERED CLASSROOM

*Marolyn Krauss, Horizon Elementary, Granger*
*Glenna Myers, Walt Disney Elementary, Mishawaka*

Welcome to learner-centered classrooms where eight and nine year old learners are valued for their experiences, their expertise, their knowledge, and the enthusiasm they bring to the learning environment. As members of the classroom, we view ourselves as facilitators in this learning process. Our self-contained classrooms provide a richness of children's literature and other resources that support multiple intelligences, brain compatibility, and curricular engagements based on big ideas and broad concepts. All ranges of literacy are included in this media rich environment, where areas of interest can be explored from multiple entry points through a variety of genres. In addition, the large blocks of time allow learners the flexibility to pursue the opportunities of that "teachable" moment.

There are some key elements within the daily invitations for structuring a learner-centered classroom. Emphasis is placed on students thinking like readers, authors, presenters, inquirers, researchers, scientists, artists, geographers, musicians, collaborators, and reflectors. The children are provided with much choice throughout the day in their explorations and investigations. Risk taking is valued and encouraged. The learner is empowered and entrusted to make decisions.

As facilitators of the ongoing learning process, we spend a lot of time at the beginning of the year getting acquainted, building community, discussing the lifelong guidelines and lifeskills, and reviewing classroom procedures. We know that each child is unique and has much to offer our classroom learning community. We also know that parents are the experts on their children, so we invite parents to share their knowledge and insights with us through a letter.

As you can surmise, day 105 looks and sounds a lot different than day one. Following is an example of meaningful experiences in which children are engaged. The opportunities mentioned below are part of an ongoing process in an effort for all of us as learners to refine and connect learning. The classroom climate and environment reflects what we value in literacy and supports developmentally appropriate learner-centered classroom practices.

### IN A LEARNER-CENTERED CLASSROOM . . .

- The learner is empowered and trusted to make decisions.
- Risk-taking is valued and encouraged.
- The focus is on making sense and sharing meaning.
- The learner engages in meaningful tasks.
- Learning is viewed as social and collaborative.
- Emphasis is placed on reading, writing, speaking, listening, thinking, and inquiry.
- The learner takes ownership and responsibility in the learning process.
- The learner reflects on his progress.
- The learner keeps a working portfolio and shares his progress with parents.
- The child is actively engaged in the learning process.

# THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN THE CLASSROOM

> ***"As good (teachers), we must optimistically and creatively give gifts and ignite passion, creating a learning organization built on trust, commitment and fun. Then, and only then, can we define ourselves as (teachers)" (Cash, 1997, p.23).***

Developmentally appropriate practice in the primary classroom requires that teachers integrate their knowledge of child development principles, expectations of school, parents, and the state, and knowledge of individual children in the classroom.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has summarized the responsibilities of early childhood teachers into five major roles:

1. Creating a caring community of learners
2. Teaching to enhance development and learning
3. Constructing appropriate curriculum
4. Assessing children's learning and development
5. Establishing reciprocal relationships with families (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

To create a caring community of learners, a teacher needs to establish an inclusive community in which all children can develop and learn. This is done by helping children learn to acknowledge and respect differences in talents and abilities and to value each person for his or her strengths. "Our first order of business, then, as sensitive, caring teachers is to get to know our students; to discover each one as a unique individual with special interests, abilities, and needs" ( Bridges, 1995, p. 16). When a teacher knows the students, the children will feel valued as individuals; the teacher can use this knowledge to develop a community and to plan curriculum and instruction. "When community exists, learning is strengthened—everyone is smarter, more ambitious, and productive. Well-formed ideas and intentions amount to little without a community to bring them to life" (Peterson, 1992, p. 2).

"Life in a learning community is helped along by the interests, ideas, and support of others. Social life is not snuffed out; it is nurtured and used to advance learning in the best way possible. Caring and interest of others breathes purpose and life into learning" (Peterson, 1992, p. 3).

The teacher needs to know how to listen to children and their responses in order to build the students' self-esteem and confidence in their own decisions. Valuing diverse responses by the children and encouraging them to take risks is important in the role of the teacher. It is essential that teachers and students construct a learning community together. "(C)ommunity in itself is more important to learning than any method or technique. When community exists, learning is strengthened." (Peterson, 1992, p. 2).

The teacher must help children develop dispositions for learning. Dispositions, as defined by Dr. Lilian Katz (1997), are tendencies to respond to situations in certain ways. Children and adults have a wide range of dispositions. In order to develop the desirable ones such as curiosity, creativity, friendliness, and cooperativeness, children need to be around a teacher who exhibits these characteristics. They also need to have things in their environment that stimulate positive responses and opportunities to practice positive responses. Dispositions for learning are fragile and can be easily destroyed if not properly handled by the teacher. There is a high correlation between school success and motivation to achieve. Teachers must nurture in children the desire to want to learn.

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Teachers enhance development and learning through appropriate instructional practices. By serving as a guide or facilitator, teachers create opportunities for children to explore, investigate, and use self-discovery skills in constructing knowledge. This environment encourages open-ended learning experiences that challenge the children regardless of their developmental level. The teacher also realizes that children learn through collaboration and interaction with adults, children, and materials. "Teachers develop, refine, and use a wide repertoire of teaching strategies to enhance children's learning and development" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 19). Some of these strategies include: helping children choose and plan their learning activities, posing problems and asking questions, introducing stimulating ideas, demonstrating specific skills, coaching, "scaffolding", and reflecting on their learning experiences.

"Classrooms should be places where children can see the strategies of successful learning demonstrated daily. Teachers should show their students what it means to be an effective learner" (Bridges, p.63). Teachers need to demonstrate how learning takes place by constantly showing how they are learning. A teacher can demonstrate an art talent or the love of reading by sharing with the children. Children can be involved in helping a teacher solve a real day-to-day problem; for example, planning a field trip. The class can help with researching locations, travel costs, and working within a budget.

Another important role of the teacher is creating and implementing a challenging, interesting, developmentally appropriate curriculum along with the children. The most effective teaching is responsive with children acting as curriculum informants (Harste, 1984). "The curriculum is not centered on either teachers or students but on learning" (Short & Burke, 1991, p. 5).

Teachers need to be aware of the impact their curriculum strategies have on the children. Many curriculum strategies do not demand enough of children, others demand too much of the wrong thing. "When next-grade expectations of mastery of basic skills are routinely pushed down to the previous grade and whole group and teacher-led instruction is the dominant teaching strategy, children who cannot sit still and attend to teacher lectures or who are bored and unchallenged or frustrated by doing workbook pages for long periods of time are mislabeled as immature, disruptive, or unready for school (Shepard & Smith, 1988)" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 20). The curriculum must provide for all areas of development: physical, emotional, social, linguistic, aesthetic, and cognitive and should be appropriate for the age groups served.

As teachers develop their plans, they should take into consideration three sources:

1. theoretical understanding of learning and how best to support learning in the classroom;
2. instructional vision (often influenced by state and district curricular guidelines);
3. kidwatching data; awareness of their student's strengths and needs. (Bridges, 1995, p. 65).

An effective teacher immerses students in a content-rich, literate learning environment. The curriculum builds upon what children already know and are able to do, is frequently integrated across subject-matter, promotes the development of knowledge and understanding, provides opportunities to support children's culture and language, and its goals are realistic and attainable for most children (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

Teachers are also responsible for assessing children's learning. Appropriate assessment and curriculum should be integrated. Assessment is essential for planning and implementing appropriate curriculum and for choosing teaching strategies that meet the needs of the children. Many times, "inaccurate or inappropriate assessment measures have been used to label, track, or otherwise harm young children" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 21). The assessment of young children should be ongoing and purposeful, reflective of the child's progress, and the result of observations, narratives, collections of work, and demonstrated performance. Assessment shows what children can do by themselves and with other children or adults.

A teacher needs knowledge of each individual child, and to completely gain this knowledge, it is necessary to form a relationship with the parents and family. This relationship can provide an environment in which "teachers and parents share their knowledge of the child and understanding of children's development and learning as part of day-to-day communication and planned conferences" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 22). Teachers can use the information to revise their instruction and curriculum, better meeting the needs and interest of parents and children. This relationship requires respect, cooperation, shared responsibility, and negotiation of conflicts in order to attain shared goals for the child.

Throughout the guide are examples of appropriate practices in relation to each of the five roles of the teacher. After establishing a community of learners in the classroom, teachers must use their understanding of child development to assist them in constructing and implementing a developmentally appropriate curriculum. They need to know how to assess what and how each child is learning and be able to adapt the curriculum to enhance the learning of each child. Teachers also need to understand the social and cultural background of children by building strong relationships with their families (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997.)

I've come to a frightening conclusion
that I am the decisive element in the classroom.
It is my personal approach that creates the climate.
It is my daily mood that makes the weather.
As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power
to make a child's life miserable or joyous.
I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration.
I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal.
In all situations, it is my response that decides
whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated,
and a child humanized or de-humanized.

Hiam Ginott

# SHINE UP YOUR FACE: FIRST GRADERS EVALUATE THEIR TEACHER'S RESPONSE

*Maggie Donovan*
*Dennis Yarmouth School, South Yarmouth, Massachusetts*

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Monday morning. Children burst through the door. At least half rush up with news from home. Two children stand before me in silence, their faces shining, their bodies stiff and erect. They wait for me to notice something. One is easy—a new haircut. The other, a moment's hesitation—got it, a missing tooth!

What will I say to these children? Which of my words will they remember?

I started to think about this during a UNH (University of New Hampshire) summer class when several of us shared memories of our teachers. Many were so insensitive sounding, yet I doubt those long ago teachers meant to be unkind or hurtful. They'd probably be astounded to hear that an offhand remark has stayed with a student all these years.

I decide to ask my children this question every Friday: "What do you remember me saying to you this week?" They sit cross-legged on the floor in an untidy cluster, and I perch on my stool next to the easel, alternately looking into their upturned faces and scribbling down their words, trying to capture the elusive realities of our classroom life.

Kelly raises her hand. "When I got hurt on the bus, I said, 'Can I go to the nurse?' You said yes. I felt good. I knew you were being true not just playing around."

The conversation continues and later I wonder about the countless variations of "I got hurt" I respond to each day. I see the theme of kindness and caring emerge from the children's words but, more subtle and challenging, the question of honesty and the issue of power. Which complaints do I take seriously, which do I dismiss? Who gets to go to the nurse, who has to sit down with a careless, "You're fine"? How do I deliver my rulings? What does Kelly mean when she says, "You were being true"?

Reading and rereading children's words, and writing about them, is a process of going down through layers of meaning. Kindness and caring on the surface; truth and power buried beneath. When I began this study, I was concerned about the surface sand, but the significance of my comments started to become apparent at the end of our first week.

Krista remembered that on the first day, I said, "Welcome back, I'm glad to see you again." She felt "good" that I remembered her from our brief meeting at the end of her kindergarten year.

After Callie was out sick, she remembered me saying, "Welcome back." It felt "good" to her because, "It felt like a lot of people liked me to be back." This intrigued me because it suggested that I was a spokesperson for the children. Donnie confirmed this when he recalled, "I didn't go to school for a week. You said, 'Finally, you're back to school. We missed you.'" He felt "...Good, because I missed all my friends."

Welcoming responses, aside from the warmth and caring they convey, seem to have two significant qualities. First, they assure children that when they are absent, they are not forgotten. They continue as part of the community. Second, they assure children that they are missed by the community. I express the community's pleasure in their return.

Building a close-knit group is of central importance to me. Our classroom is a place where children learn to work collaboratively, to disagree without malice, to ask for what they need, to contribute ideas, to wonder, to experiment, to learn about themselves and the world, and to live with each other. Daily meeting is inviolate. Discussion takes up a large portion of our day. Children are used to talk in many forms. When I ask what they remember me saying to them, it is not so different from other inquiries I or their classmates might make.

Constance's remembrance of my comments on her out-of-school life opened a whole other area of response—response that recognizes a child's home life. Her words tripping over themselves in her eagerness to express her feelings, she said, "When I showed you on the calendar when the variety show was you were amazed. You said, 'That's the variety show!' You were chanting for me!" I think Constance meant I was cheering for her. She went on, " It made me feel you were thinking it was good for me to do it."

Candace recalled, "You said you really wanted to see me skating on the tape. It made me feel that you were my mother. My mother wanted to see it that bad too!" Time after time, remarks of mine that indicated an interest in the day-to-day happenings at home were reported to me with positive interpretations like, "Really, really good," "happy," and "proud."

In turn, I responded by listening with greater attention to the tales of weekends and evenings. I made a point of remembering the names of brothers, sisters, and pets so that I could ask about them from time to time. I remembered descriptions of children's bedrooms and backyards, when a grandparent came to visit, when a neighborhood friend moved away. Attention that at first seemed difficult and contrived eventually blossomed into genuine interest on my part. The other characters in the children's lives became real and three dimensional to me. I remembered their names without effort and asked after them with authentic concern. So the gulf between home and school became more shallow, the intimacy between us grew. Like the links in the paper chains we made to decorate our room, I responded to them, they recalled my response, I responded to their recollections, and the bonds between us grew stronger.

Toward the end of the year, I interviewed some of the children. First, I asked the familiar, "What do you remember me saying to you this week and how did it make you feel?" The three new questions were: (1) If you were talking with someone who has never been to our school, and they asked you what I know about you, what would you say? (2) Is there anything I don't know about you that you would like me to know? and (3) How do I know the things I know about you?

The answers were perceptive and touching. Here is one example. Constance: "You know a hundred things about me. You know I am a historian. You know I love poetry. You don't know that I just learned the three-way jump rope. You don't know that my Mom and me in the afternoons, we're making a quilt for Jessica, the new baby. You know things about me because you see them, I tell them to you, you talk to my Mom." Constance had just summed up my research strategy of observation and interview!

I'm learning an interesting dynamic about research. Research does require a degree of detachment and distance. I have to discipline myself to respond in a low key way to what they tell me so that they won't stop talking or say something to get a certain reaction from me. I have to watch and wait rather than rush in. I have to step back and see clearly. But beneath this surface detachment is growing a stronger attachment than I've ever felt. I am so touched by their integrity and the degree to which they take me seriously and go out of their way, not to please me, but to help me in various ways throughout our days.

Listening with care to 22 voices each day is a goal for me, rather than a reality, but I am no longer so concerned about whether my words will worry or confuse children. Worry and confusion are byproducts of real, honest dialogue that gets worked out over time. It's the mindless, heedless responses, even though they may be positive, that I am determined to avoid. In order to respond authentically, I think it's imperative to respond less. Listen, but not be paralyzed by the need to say the right thing.

As I reflect, I realize I have learned at least three things from my children. First, their work, their behavior, their attitudes, and their lives are all mixed together. I can't untangle work response without compromising the integrity of what students are telling me. I am responding to them as people whenever I give them any type of response. My opinions about their work are my opinions about them.

Second, how striking it is that as much time as I spend trying to capture children's wandering attention, as inattentive as some of them may seem, they are listening. Everyone could quote me with certainty even after days or weeks had passed. Perhaps we need to stand conventional wisdom on its head and ask not, "Are they listening to me?" but "Am I really listening to them?"

Third, every category or response I uncovered was connected to power; the inordinate amount of power the teacher has in the classroom. When I decide who needs to see the nurse, when I welcome back a child who's been absent, when I give permission or approval, when I notice things, I am speaking from a position of enormous, disproportionate power. My words have a weight that, for better or worse, leaves them standing like ancient monuments over time. Each day I remind myself, "speak with care."

Or, be still. A nod, a smile, a gesture or, that most compelling response, stillness, can be more satisfying than words. One memory of Krista's is my favorite example of the strength of nonverbal response. When she was telling me how much she loves to write, I didn't say anything, but I appreciated her explanation. As she said, " Wow, it really shined up your face!"

# DIALOGUE

To help you debrief—to reflect on and interpret—the living and learning you and your students experience within your classroom learning community, try answering the questions from the Teacher Self-Reflection form. The form signals a "time out," a chance to catch your breath and reflect on your kidwatching, to determine what has been working for you and your students, what hasn't been working as well, and how you might go about revising your teaching.

| **Teacher Self-Reflection** |
|---|
| What worked for me as the teacher? What didn't? Why?<br>(Consider time, resources, materials, learning modalities, disciplines.) |
| What worked for the students? What didn't? Why?<br>(Consider time, resources, materials, learning modalities, disciplines.) |
| What strengths and needs did I notice in my students? |
| How will I use this information to plan my next instructional steps? |

Make as many copies of the form as you need and use them at any point in the school day as you feel a need to breathe, reflect, learn, and revise your teaching. In this way, you'll develop and refine your teaching art.

(Source: Bridges, L. (1995). *Creating Your Classroom Community.* York, Maine: Stenhouse. Reprinted by permission.)

# WHEN YOU LEAVE . . . ASK YOURSELF!

- ✓ "What did my children learn for tomorrow?"
- ✓ "Did I look into every child's eyes?"
- ✓ "Did I touch every heart?"
- ✓ "Was there too much pressure to hurry?"
- ✓ "Did I look for signs of success and celebrate them?"
- ✓ "Were my children treated as children and not miniature adults?"
- ✓ "Did I talk too much? Did the children understand?"
- ✓ "Are my children curious, full of exploration, willing to learn?"
- ✓ "Am I working alongside my children taking them further than they ever would go alone?"
- ✓ "Are my children experiencing childhood?"
- ✓ "Am I full of warmth and feeling?"
- ✓ "Is our school, our classroom, a place of now?"
- ✓ "Did children smile without reason?"
- ✓ "Was today, with me as a teacher, good enough to be a part of someone's fragile life?"

(Source: Indianapolis Area AEYC, (1997). Newsletter, 4(2). Reprinted by permission.)

# VARIOUS EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| AAHPERD | American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance<br>703-476-3436<br>Journals: *Journal of Health Education* and<br>*Journal of Physical Education and Recreation and Dance* |
| AERA | American Educational Research Association<br>202-223-9485<br>Journals: *Educational Researcher* and *American Educational Research Journal* |
| ASCA | American School Counselor Association<br>800-306-4722<br>Journal: *Elementary School Guidance and Counseling* |
| ACEI | Association for Childhood Education International<br>800-423-3563<br>Journals: *Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education*<br>*Childhood Education* |
| ASCD | Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development<br>800-933-2723<br>Journals: *Educational Leadership* and *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* |
| CEC | Council for Exceptional Children<br>703-620-3660<br>Journal: *Teaching Exceptional Children* |
| IRA | International Reading Association<br>800-336-7323<br>Journals: *The Reading Teacher* and *Indiana Reading Quarterly* (ISRA) |
| MENC | Music Educators National Conference<br>703-860-4000<br>Journal: *Music Educators Journal* |
| NAEA | National Art Education Association<br>800-299-8321<br>Journal: *Art Education* |
| NABE | National Association for Bilingual Education<br>202-898-1829<br>Journal: *Bilingual Research Journal* |
| NAESP | National Association of Elementary School Principals<br>703-684-3345<br>Journal: *Principal* |

| | |
|---|---|
| NAEYC | National Association for the Education of Young Children<br>800-424-2460<br>Journal: *Young Children* |
| NAGC | National Association for Gifted Children<br>202-785-4268<br>Journal: *Gifted Child Quarterly* |
| NCSS | National Council of the Social Studies<br>202-966-7840<br>Journal: *Social Studies and the Young Learner* |
| NCTE | National Council of Teachers of English<br>800-369-6283<br>Journals: *Language Arts* and *Primary Voices* |
| NCTM | National Council of Teachers of Mathematics<br>703-620-9840<br>Journals: *Teaching Children Mathematics* and<br>*Journal for Research in Mathematics Education* |
| NELL | National Network for Early Language Learning<br>202-429-9292 |
| NSTA | National Science Teachers Association<br>703-243-7100<br>Journals: *Science and Children* and *Dragonfly* |
| PDK | Phi Delta Kappa<br>800-766-1156<br>Journal: *Phi Delta Kappan* |
| WLU | Whole Language Umbrella<br>800-369-6283<br>Journal: *Talking Points* |

Information concerning state and local affiliates may be obtained by contacting the national associations.

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# ROLE OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANT

*"I'd like to consider myself a team player, a partner to the teacher(s) to whom I am assigned, a member of my school building staff, and a part of the school district."*

Penny Rinehart
Instructional Assistant

# ROLE OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANT

In this chapter the important role of the Instructional Assistant is discussed. This chapter contains the following selections:

## I. Role of the Instructional Assistant

- ☐ Instructional Assistant Story by Kristi Kutche
- ☐ Instructional Assistant Story by Penny Rinehart
- ☐ Instructional Assistant Story by Jan Stuglik
- ☐ The Instructional Assistant and Teacher Partnership
- ☐ Vital Qualities for Instructional Assistants as Identified by Indiana Teachers
- ☐ Vital Qualities for Teachers as Identified by Indiana Instructional Assistants
- ☐ 25 Possible Roles for the Instructional Assistant in the Classroom

## II. Role of the Instructional Assistant References and Resources

# THE ROLE OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANT

Instructional Assistant Story

*Kristi Kutche*
*Hazel Dell Elementary, Noblesville*

"The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery." This quote, by U.S. poet Mark Van Doren, is displayed on the cover of my portfolio, which I prepared to exemplify my qualities and beliefs about teaching. When I organized my portfolio, I had intended on interviewing for a teaching job. However, I came to realize that the market for teachers was extremely competitive, and I might have to "settle" for a Prime Time instructional assistant position. Although I was eager to have my own class, I accepted my instructional assistant position with optimism and excitement. I began to reflect upon the quote on my portfolio and started to see my job as an opportunity for discovering new methods of teaching, recognizing various discipline models, and observing different philosophies of education.

> *" 'The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery.' . . .This quote is displayed on the cover of my portfolio, which I prepared to exemplify my qualities and beliefs about teaching."*

As I began my first few days as an assistant, I felt fortunate to be able to observe and work with different teachers, and I recognized them as role models and mentors. I realized that the teachers I worked with would help assist me in discovering the type of teacher that I wanted to be. I was able to observe the same skill being taught in completely different ways by different teachers. This opportunity helped me to take notes as to which methods were most appropriate for my personality, and I began to develop my own teaching style. As the weeks went on, I began taking more responsibility working independently with groups of children. This experience helped me to adapt my lesson plans to their individual needs and come up with activities that were academically appropriate for the students. I was also asked to work with children who were struggling with basic concepts. It was helpful for me to realize children work at different levels within one age group. I was able to look to my cooperating teachers for suggestions and encouragement. As a result, I gained confidence and pride in my teaching ability. Similarly, I gained confidence as the children began identifying me as one of their teachers. My student teaching experience was not long enough for the children to recognize me as their teacher. However, as an assistant, I was in the classroom so often that the children addressed me as a teacher. As a result, I feel more comfortable handling disruptive behavior when it occurs. I believe this aspect was crucial to my growth as a teacher, and I feel much more confident in working through conflicts with the students.

The instructional assistant position provided the opportunity for me to witness many different ways of helping children in the education process. I feel that I am now more prepared for my own classroom than I was prior to this experience. I firmly believe that a teacher never stops learning and can only become better with experience, and I know that I will approach my first teaching position with more enthusiasm, confidence, and less anxiety than I would have prior to this year of discovery. Therefore, I do not label my decision to accept my instructional assistant position as "settling"; instead I view it as a stepping stone to becoming a better teacher.

## Instructional Assistant Story

*Penny Rinehart*
*Central Elementary, Martinsville*

I have always loved school, school activities, and the people associated with school. College was not an option for me. So, I picked the business curriculum in high school. After graduation, I found work as a secretary. I had stopped working, and was an at-home mom, when I was given the opportunity to become an instructional assistant in the kindergarten class in the school my children were attending. I soon learned it was a job with which I was comfortable and capable and loved to go to each morning. For the last eight years, I have worked at four elementary schools in our school system in kindergarten, first, second, and third grade classrooms. I find that my duties vary according to the grade level, the teacher's personality and teaching style, and the personality of the class itself.

In every class, it is important for me to know the children and their abilities and help them discover the way to their individual successes. Some students need little help from me academically, but I may spend time helping them to develop study habits, encouraging them to put forth extra effort, or offering praise for accomplishments. Some students need directions repeated several times or in a different way before they are able to work. When the teacher is called from the room or is dealing with an individual student, I am the one to continue with the class. I have had teachers ask me to work with small groups of students so that we were essentially team teaching. Occasionally, I bring to the classroom a special project involving reading, gardening, or sewing (my personal interests) to reinforce a current learning unit.

Another person in the classroom, when the children are very young, enables a class to make quicker transitions in the classroom or from one location to another. Young people often need to be reminded of procedures or helped with personal items (shoe strings, zippers, backpacks, papers, books, etc.). I am the person who can tie a shoe, hand out a tissue, or take a temperature. An extra person allows the class to divide into smaller units for discussion groups. This allows the addition of skits or plays. In some classrooms where grades are not used to measure success, I may spend time observing and helping to evaluate students' spelling, reading, or writing. Having two people can double the input when problem solving classroom situations, and it can double the pleasure in classroom successes!

I like to consider myself a team player, a partner to the teacher(s) to whom I am assigned, a member of my school building staff, and a part of the school district. I like the theory that everyone at a school, regardless of his/her position, is working toward the same goal: successful students.

> *"In every class, it is important for me to know the children and their abilities and help them discover the way to their individual successes."*

*Jan Stuglik*
*Cherry Tree Elementary, Carmel*

**Instructional Assistant Story**

For the past three years, I have been a kindergarten instructional assistant. I see my current role as that of a co-teacher, a role that evolved gradually over time. My classroom teacher, Candy, has become my mentor and friend. We have a very positive, easy-going working relationship.

During the first year, my role was to work with individual or small groups of children in their areas of need. I usually worked in the hallway rather than in the classroom and kept track of the time spent working with each child. The time was turned into my building principal. I kept skill sheets on each of the children. During full group activities, I was usually in the classroom. I would sit with children who needed gentle reminders to stay on task. As the year progressed, I began to feel more comfortable in the classroom. (I had not taught for ten years.) Periodically, I facilitated the calendar and sharing time. At the beginning, I was unsure of myself and copied Candy's style; I soon found my own style and relaxed in front of the whole group. Candy always allowed me to offer my opinion and, by the end of the year, included me in some planning. She always made me feel what I had to say was important.

> *"I see my current role as that of a co-teacher, a role that evolved gradually over time."*

The second year, Candy and I decided that I should remain in the classroom instead of going into the hallway to work with individual children. This gave us two adults in the classroom, and (unlike my first year) I felt as if I knew more of what was going on. I took over doing the calendar and sharing time. Whenever my classroom teacher was called from the room, she felt very comfortable leaving me in charge. Being in the classroom the majority of the time, I knew what to do. By the end of the second year, we began doing most of the planning and some of the teaching together. Candy began exploring the Project Approach (Katz, 1998). I also read a lot of the literature and toward the end of the year, we began to implement small parts of the approach in the classroom. We began discussing at great length what we would like to accomplish during the next year and how we would do it.

In my third year as an instructional assistant, I was considered a co-teacher. I met the children and their parents on the first day of school along with Candy. I was involved with all of the daily planning and added personal input into the process. Because of this, I felt very comfortable with teaching at any time (especially when there was a substitute teacher). I was an active participant in learning about and implementing the Project Approach in the classroom, and we both worked with the children and decided who needed help. This position has developed over the three years, not overnight. I feel I am treated as an equal, not as a subordinate, and that makes all the difference. The parents and children also look at me in this way. I have really enjoyed learning about the Project Approach as a way of facilitating the children's learning. I can honestly say this is not Candy's classroom but our classroom.

# THE INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANT AND TEACHER PARTNERSHIP

Instructional assistants can play a vital role in the early childhood classroom. In order to facilitate optimal learning conditions, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has recommended no more than 25 children in a room with two adults in the primary grades. In Indiana, the Prime Time funding formula determines the target adult to pupil ratio for each school corporation. School corporations participating in Prime Time receive state funding toward the hiring of classroom teachers and instructional assistants (in kindergarten through third grade) to facilitate movement toward the determined ratio.

An instructional assistant can enhance the educational program by:

- increasing individual instructional time for students,
- sharing new and different ideas, talents, and observations, and
- providing additional adult assistance for the children.

There should be a collaborative relationship between the teacher and the assistant. The instructional assistant should be treated as a member of the teaching team and be able to develop a feeling of ownership through close communication with the teacher.

The instructional assistant must be aware of responsibilities and expectations. Guidelines should be developed to include:

- role descriptions,
- designations of supervisory responsibility,
- provisions for orientation and professional growth,
- procedures for evaluation, and
- expectations in areas of school ethics and procedures, confidentiality, and family/school communication.

It is essential that ongoing and effective professional development be provided to all adults working with children. In order to develop effective instructional strategies, the assistant should have an opportunity for extended learning about subject matter, instructional methods, and child development. It is important for the teacher to model appropriate classroom strategies and to discuss how these are essential in helping children learn and grow. The teacher needs to allow time for the instructional assistant to develop these skills and provide feedback on her interactions with children. The teacher and assistant must take time to discuss planning and the development of curriculum and instruction. The assistant brings a second set of eyes and a different perspective that can be utilized in assessing children. The assistant may observe things that the teacher hasn't seen or form a special relationship with a student that may provide greater insight into that child.

The exact role that the instructional assistant plays in the classroom needs to be determined by the teacher together with the assistant. The effective use of an instructional assistants depends on the teacher, her leadership style, perception of the role, and the ability to incorporate the assistant in the classroom. The assistant's primary role is to assist children in a meaningful way, particularly during the core curricular program. On the following pages are suggestions from teachers and assistants regarding ways to strengthen the partnership, as well as roles the assistant can play in the classroom.

# Vital Qualities for Instructional Assistants as Identified by Indiana Teachers

### *Enjoyment of Young Children*

Children know when others enjoy being with them. Instructional assistants should be enthusiastic about working closely with young children. School needs to be a safe place, where children feel they are valued and appreciated.

### *An Understanding of Child Growth and Development*

Through observing the teacher model strategies, attending professional development opportunities, and having ongoing communication with the teacher, the instructional assistant will increase his knowledge about child growth and development.

### *A Good Language Model*

A child needs good language role models for her language and literacy development. It is important that adults interacting with young children use appropriate verbal and written communication, including correct grammar and mechanics.

### *Consistency*

It is important for young children to have consistency in their lives. Therefore, instructional assistants need to be committed to coming to work every day and on time.

### *Respect for Confidentiality*

Children, their families, and school employees have rights in terms of confidentiality. No school employee should violate these rights by discussing information about school business, a child, or a family outside the school.

### *Patience*

Children require patience. It takes time for children to develop skills, such as working with others, following routines, listening to a story, etc. Instructional assistants need to understand this and demonstrate patience when interacting with children.

### *Appreciation of Diversity*

The way adults teach children to conform to societal norms and biases affect how children perceive themselves and others. Instructional assistants need to be aware of, respect, and appreciate racial, gender, cultural, physical, and cognitive similarities and differences in children.

### *Sensitivity to Children at Different Developmental Levels*

Young children in a classroom will naturally be at various developmental levels. Children will have different knowledge and experience with reading, writing, working with numbers, etc. In a developmentally appropriate classroom, continuous progress is valued. Children are taken from where they are and moved forward, rather than being held to a list of grade level skills or compared to other children at the same chronological age.

### *Desire for Feedback and Willingness to Ask Questions*

Children benefit when teachers and assistants collaborate and work together to improve their strategies for working with their students. The teacher and instructional assistant should have ongoing conversations, give feedback, and explore questions together about interactions with children.

### *Understanding Rules and Policies*

Schools and school corporations have many rules and policies in place that anyone working with children should know and understand. These may include procedures for children being picked up from school, administration of medications, and reporting suspected abuse cases, along with many others. While the instructional assistant may not directly follow up on some of these issues, it is important that she understands the policies and procedures.

# Vital Qualities for Teachers as Identified by Indiana Instructional Assistants

### *Communicate on a Daily Basis*

The teacher needs to take time to talk with the assistant about plans for the day. It is helpful for the teacher to not only explain activities but to also share what she hopes the children will gain from these experiences. It is best when teachers and assistants have a time set aside each day to plan and discuss activities and observations. This may be before school, after school, or during a planning period.

### *Treat the Assistant as a Professional*

It is important that the teacher treat the instructional assistant as a professional. This includes addressing the assistant as "Ms." or "Mr." to the children (if that is how the teacher is addressed). Children and parents should be told about the role the assistant plays in the classroom. Also, teachers should help the assistant increase in his professional knowledge by discussing events in the classroom, sharing professional articles or knowledge, and being open to questions the assistant may have about the classroom environment. Instructional assistants often value being active participants in faculty meetings, celebrations of birthdays, and professional development opportunities.

### *Value Observations and Insights*

The instructional assistant will have many opportunities to observe children in the learning environment. The teacher should take advantage of this other perspective by having the assistant share his observations. The teacher may also include the assistant in parent conferences, case conferences, and other meetings about children, as deemed appropriate.

### *Use the Assistant's Time & Talents Wisely*

The instructional assistant can play many roles in the classroom. Most assistants commented that time working with children (versus the copy machine, etc.) was the most valuable. It is important for the teacher to take time to help the assistant develop her skills in working with children and have her spend the majority of the day in the instructional setting. Also, instructional assistants come to classrooms with many interests and talents. They should be provided opportunities to share these and teach the children.

### *Provide Meaningful Feedback*

It is important for the teacher to take the time to give the instructional assistant feedback regarding his work in the classroom. This includes positive feedback, as well as suggestions for changes. If the teacher feels something needs to be changed, she needs to explain why. Before making assumptions, the teacher needs to ask the assistant why she dealt with a situation in a particular manner. This allows the assistant to grow through experience, as all educators do.

### *Respect the Assistant's Schedule and Responsibilities*

Reasonable time frames should be given for work requested. If the assistant is shared with another teacher, both should be aware of her schedule and responsibilities. The teacher(s) need to be conscious of the schedule to be sure that the assistant has time in the day for lunch and short breaks for personal needs. It is also important to let the assistant know when there will be schedule changes due to school or classroom events.

### THE PARTNERSHIP

Both assistants and teachers said it is important to have a sense of humor and to accept that each person will have good days and bad days. It is important that each believes she can learn and grow from the other person and not feel that she is being constantly judged by the other. Honest and open communication is very important in the relationship. Building the partnership relationship helps create a better learning environment for children.

# 25 POSSIBLE ROLES FOR THE INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANT IN THE CLASSROOM

**Art Activities**
Help to prepare materials and assist children in art activities.

**Assessment**
Write down observations of children as part of ongoing assessment.

**Audio Tape**
Audio tape children reading aloud for assessment in this area.

**Author Circles**
Participate in and help lead author circles of children sharing their work.

**Book Making**
Assist children in preparing books (binding, formatting, etc.) for publication.

**Centers**
Help to set up centers, and work with kids when they are exploring these areas.

**Computers**
Assist children with the computer, including writing and other projects.

**Conflict Resolution**
Help children to work through conflicts and find alternatives.

**Cooking**
Help to prepare materials and assist children in cooking activities.

**Editor's Table**
Assist children who are editing the written work from the classroom.

**Field Trips**
Assist in the planning and coordination of field trips.

**Focused Assistance**
Help students who need focused attention with a particular skill or concept.

**Interests and Talents**
Teach students about areas in which you have a special interest/talent.

**Library**
Take small groups of children to the library/media center to gather information.

**Literature Circles**
Participate in and help coordinate a small group's discussion of a book.

**Manipulatives**
Help students work with manipulatives to gain understanding of math concepts.

**Newspaper**
Assist students in the development of a class newspaper or newsletter for parents.

**Partner Read**
Partner read with a child, with each of you reading aloud sections of the text.

**Photographs**
Take pictures of students engaged in activities, which can be used for reflection and assessment.

**Portfolios**
Assist students in organizing and choosing pieces for their portfolios.

**Projects**
Assist children when they are working on individual and small group projects.

**Read Aloud**
Read stories and books to individuals, small groups, and/or the whole class.

**Video Tape**
Video tape projects and activities in the classroom, possibly for student portfolios.

**Volunteers**
Help to assist parent, community, or student volunteers in the classroom.

**Written Conversation**
Have written conversations with students in the classroom.

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# PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES:
## Building Strong Family/Parent Involvement

*"Parents are your friends.*
*Show your interest in a child and parents are on your side.*
*Be casual, be off-handed, be cold toward the child,*
*and parents can never work closely with you . . .*
*To touch the child is to touch the parent.*
*To praise the child is to praise the parent.*
*To criticize the child is to hit at the parent.*
*The two are two, but the two are one."*

*James Hymes*

# PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES:
# Building Strong Family/Parent Involvement

In this chapter, the importance of family/school/community partnerships is explored from multiple perspectives. You will find articles from teachers, parents, and professional journals and organizations. This chapter is divided into the following sections:

## I. Getting to Know Children and Families

- ☐ Introduction
- ☐ Parent Letter
- ☐ Starting the Year: Building Strong Family/Parent Involvement

## II. Successful Partnerships

- ☐ Introduction
- ☐ Parent Story: *My Experience as a Parent Volunteer* by Kim Joyce
- ☐ *School/Family/Community Partnerships* by Joyce L. Epstein
- ☐ *Parents as Partners in Children's Learning* by NAEYC
- ☐ *Grandparents as Parents: A Primer for Schools* by Dianne Rothenberg

## III. Helping Families Understand Developmentally Appropriate Practice

- ☐ Introduction
- ☐ Teacher Story: *The Metamorphosis of Mary*
- ☐ Parent Story: *Mary's Journal*
- ☐ *Preventing and Resolving Parent-Teacher Differences* by Lilian Katz, et.al.

## IV. Challenges Facing Children and Families

- ☐ Introduction
- ☐ *Distressed Families and Troubled Children* by Robert Burke
- ☐ *Coping with Loss* by Southern Poverty Law Center
- ☐ *Media Violence and Young Children* by NAEYC
- ☐ *Families Matter: Begin with the Basics* by Indiana Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships

## V. Partnerships with Families References and Resources

# UNITY

I dreamed I stood in a studio,
and watched two sculptors there.
The clay they used was a young child's mind,
and they fashioned it with care.

One was a teacher.
The tools he used were books and music and art,
one a parent with a guiding hand
and a gentle loving heart.

Day after day, the teacher toiled
with a touch that was deft and sure,
while the parent labored by his side
and polished and smoothed it o'er.

And when at last their task was done,
they were proud of what they had wrought,
for the things they had molded into the child
could neither be sold nor bought.

And each agreed he would have failed
if he had worked alone,
for behind the parent stood the school,
and behind the teacher, the home.

- Ray A. Lingenfelter

# I. Getting to Know Children and Families

It is important for teachers to know the children they teach: who they are developmentally, individually, and culturally. The main resource for learning about individual children, and how their cultures and backgrounds influence their learning and interactive styles, is the family. At the beginning of the school year, Ms. Miller asks the parent(s) of each of her third grade students to write a letter about their child so that she can best meet the child's needs. The following letter is an example of the information she receives about each child in response to her request. The names and locations have been changed to respect the confidentiality of the family.

*Dear Ms. Miller,*

*Thanks for giving parents an opportunity to share their knowledge of their children. I thought I'd address each of the questions you posed as a means of organizing my thoughts about Pete.*

*As you have already noticed, Pete has a great love for sports. He has played on t-ball and soccer teams and will soon start playing hockey. He has been a valuable member of every team on which he has played. Part of this is due to athletic ability; but, in addition, he is a strategic, smart player who is very aware of what's happening around him and anticipates what must be done next. Pete has been unflaggingly enthusiastic and committed to the activities in which he chooses to participate. He listens and responds to his coaches' instructions and works well as part of a team. I have described Pete's love of and participation in sports first, in part because it's how he spends much of his free time, but, also in part because I believe the way he plays says a lot about him as a person.*

*I guess the next thing that springs to mind, when I think about Pete's interests and talents, is his sociability. Pete has always loved to play with friends and has had an easy time making them. We moved to Montreal when he was four, and within a very short time of beginning kindergarten, he developed many friendships which were important to him throughout our three years there. When I observe Pete with his friends, I notice his sense of humor, his willingness to share in decisions, and his love of active play. Pete has always gravitated to children who are creative, free thinkers.*

*Finally, I would mention that I think Pete is a very good problem solver. I have always included him in family decision making and helped him to think through the ramifications of possible choices. I sometimes wish Pete had less to say about everything; but, for the most part, I am pleased with his logical thinking and inquisitiveness.*

*There are a number of things that it would be important for you, as a teacher, to know about Pete. First, his teachers have previously described him as a driven student. Pete is an achiever and has always wanted to be, and, always has been, one of the best students in his class. This makes it unlikely that he would ask you for help or reveal that he is struggling. I suggested to him before we moved here that he might want some help adjusting to school in English (meaning English as a second language instruction, or some other supplemental tutoring), and he adamantly opposed the idea. He also is intent on presenting himself to be just like everyone else. I asked him whether he had told you that he has learned about measurements previously in centimeters, etc., not in inches and feet; and, of course, he said he hadn't. I think the combination of Pete's drive and desire to integrate is so strong that he may not ask for help when he needs it.*

*As far as I can tell, given that school has been in session for such a short time, Pete was taught in a much more structured way at his previous school. There was much less room for choice and much more direction. I think Pete will respond well to the freedom in his new school, but it certainly will require adaptation on his part.*

*I'll conclude with a few observations about Pete's temperament and family situation. Pete has always been a sensitive person who can be quite easily hurt. However, unless he knows someone very well, he is reluctant to reveal his feelings. For example, his second grade teacher asked me if he ever became angry or unhappy! Fortunately, he feels free to reveal these negative moods to me at home. However, he will almost certainly keep them under wraps at school.*

*This is important for you to know as Pete has a lot to deal with on the home front right now. We are both still adjusting to the move and to the demands of my job and Pete's school and extra-curricular schedule. In addition, his father, who lived in Pittsburgh when we lived in Montreal, has moved to Ft. Wayne. Pete, therefore, sees him for two weekends every month rather than every four to five weeks. All of these are major life changes for both of us and, as you can imagine, the stress level in our house is high right now.*

*I hope this letter helps you to better understand my son. Please, let me know if there is any additional information I can provide.*

*Sincerely,*

*Peggy Jones*

> *"If we take the time to create trust and develop open communication at the start of school, it is easier to sustain a positive, open relationship throughout the year."*
>
> Bobbi Fisher

# STARTING THE YEAR: BUILDING STRONG FAMILY/PARENT INVOLVEMENT

By asking parents to write a letter about their child (like the one on the previous pages), Ms. Miller shows that she understands the importance of the family being involved in their child's education. It is imperative that teachers build partnerships with families to establish mutual respect and trust. Each party brings something important to the partnership. The teacher brings knowledge of child development and educational goals. The parent brings a special knowledge of her own child, as Ms. Jones displayed in her letter to Ms. Miller.

Before the school year starts, a teacher can begin to build positive partnerships with the families of the students in the class. The teacher should familiarize herself with the community in which the school is located. Learning about the community provides valuable insights into the cultures and life circumstances of the children in the classroom.

The initial contact made with a family is an opportunity to discuss the goals the parents and the teacher have for the child. There are many approaches a teacher can use to put everyone at ease and start the year on a positive note.

1. Make a telephone call, two or three weeks before the opening of school, welcoming the family to the new school year and to the classroom.

2. Mail a brief note to each child and family welcoming them. (Don't forget to have all school-home communication translated into the family's primary language whenever possible.)

3. Host an informal open house before the opening of school. This provides an opportunity for parents and children to meet the teacher, see the classroom, and familiarize themselves with the school community.

4. Send home a packet of information on the first day of school. This packet can include a letter from the teacher, a parent information form, a handout about learning, and various forms from the office and the school/home organization. The letter will help the parents get to know the teacher and explain some of the things their child will be learning and doing throughout the year.

> *"The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children's families."*
>
> Joyce L. Epstein

# II. Successful Partnerships

Parents have different ways of becoming involved in their child's education. Many parents today struggle with the basic everyday responsibilities—getting their child up, dressed, fed, and to school. Those efforts should be appreciated as well as those of the parents who are always actively involved in classroom activities and home/school organizations.

In *Constructing Curriculum for the Primary Grades* (Dodge, Jalbon & Bickart, 1994, p. 211), the authors describe a range of involvement families may have in the educational process of their children:

- **Basic obligation:** parents meet the child's needs for safety, security, nutrition, health care, and discipline.
- **Responsive communication**: parents consistently respond to school notices, invitations, meetings, forms, and progress reports.
- **Volunteers**: parents or family members assist classroom teachers and/or school administrators with school tasks and attend events and/or workshops.
- **In home follow-through**: parents help their children at home with learning activities coordinated with the children's classwork.
- **Decision-makers**: parents are involved in school governance and advocacy through the PTA/PTO, advisory councils, school board, or other decision-making committees or groups.

The following pages contain information about forming successful partnerships with schools, families, and communities. Also included is a copy of an ERIC Digest focusing on grandparents as parents and how schools can help.

Parent Story

# MY EXPERIENCE AS A PARENT VOLUNTEER

*Kim Joyce*
*Hazel Dell Elementary, Nobelsville*

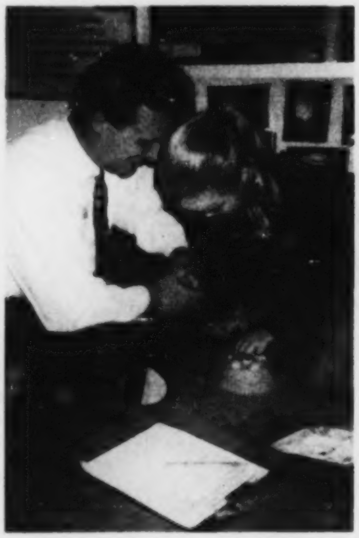
I have had the most rewarding experience this year holding the position as a parent-helper in my son's kindergarten class. When I volunteered to be a classroom helper, I didn't really know what to expect, because I had always been on the other side of things as a parent.

I was made to feel as if I was not just a mom there to staple, glue, and cut out, but that I was a very essential part of the classroom in helping the children in their learning and development. It wasn't a 'volunteer as you want' kind of position; people (both the teacher and the students) really depended on me to be there.

The teacher's daily plans included me. From the moment I walked into the classroom, I was actively involved with the students. I gained a wonderful understanding of the management of the classroom, the curriculum, the projects the children were involved in, and the students' personalities.

Being a part of my son's education is very important to me. I was able to observe him academically, socially, and emotionally. I was able to learn what questions to ask him.

Education of a child needs to be a partnership between the teacher and the parents. Now that I am on the parent side of the coin, I have learned what a positive support we, as parents, can be by volunteering our time in the classroom.



> *"Our best moments as teachers or parents are likely to come when we stop, look, and listen to children, when we walk along the trail with them—experiencing the 'everyday, ordinary, extraordinary life of the child.'"*
>
> Mimi Brodsky Chenfeld

# SCHOOL/FAMILY/COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS:
## Caring for the Children We Share

*Joyce L. Epstein*

(Original article printed in *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(9), 1995, p. 701-712.
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The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children's families. If educators view children simply as *students*, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. That is, the family is expected to do its job and leave the education of children to the schools. If educators view students as *children*, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development. Partners recognize their shared interests in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students.

There are many reasons for developing school, family, and community partnerships. They can improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and in the community, and help teachers with their work. However, the main reason to create such partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and in later life. When parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work.

What do successful partnership programs look like? How can practices be effectively designed and implemented? What are the results of better communications, interactions, and exchanges across these three important contexts? These questions have challenged research and practice, creating an interdisciplinary field of inquiry into school, family, and community partnerships with "caring" as a core concept.

The field has been strengthened by supporting federal, state, and local policies. For example, the Goals 2000 legislation sets partnerships as a voluntary national goal for all schools; Title I specifies and mandates programs and practices of partnership in order for schools to qualify for or maintain funding. Many states and districts have developed or are preparing policies to guide schools in creating more systematic connections with families and communities. These policies reflect research results and the prior successes of leading educators who have shown that these goals are attainable.

Underlying these policies and programs is a theory of how social organizations connect; a framework of the basic components of school, family, and community partnerships for children's learning; a growing literature on the positive and negative results of these connections for students, families, and schools; and an understanding of how to organize good programs. In this article, I summarize the theory, framework, and guidelines that have assisted the schools in our research projects in building partnerships and that should help any elementary, middle, or high school to take similar steps.

### Overlapping Spheres of Influence: Understanding the Theory

Schools make choices. They might conduct only a few communications and interactions with families and communities, keeping the three spheres of influence that directly affect student learning and development relatively separate. Or they might conduct many high-quality communications and interactions designed to bring all three spheres of influence closer together. With frequent interactions between schools, families, and communities, more students are more likely to receive common messages from various people about the importance of school, of working hard, of thinking creatively, of helping one another, and of staying in school . . .

. . . The model of school, family, and community partnerships locates the student at the center. The inarguable fact is that students are the main actors in their education, development, and success in school. School, family, and community partnerships cannot simply produce successful students. Rather, partnership activities may be designed to engage, guide, energize, and motivate students to produce their own successes. The assumption is that, if children feel cared for and encouraged to work hard in the role of student, they are more likely to do their best to learn to read, write, calculate, and learn other skills and talents and to remain in school.

Interestingly and somewhat ironically, studies indicate that students are also crucial for the success of school, family, and community partnerships. Students are often their parents' main source of information about school. In strong partnership programs, teachers help students understand and conduct traditional communications with families (e.g., delivering memos or report cards) and new communications (e.g., interacting with family members about homework or participating in parent/teacher/student conferences). As we gain more information about the role of students in partnerships, we are developing a more complete understanding of how schools, families, and communities must work with students to increase their chances for success.

### How Theory Sounds in Practice

In some schools there are still educators who say, "If the family would just do its job, we could do our job." And there are still families who say, "I raised this child; now it is your job to educate her." These words embody the theory of "separate spheres of influence." Other educators say, "I cannot do my job without the help of my students' families and the support of this community." And some parents say, "I really need to know what is happening in school in order to help my child." These phrases embody the theory of "overlapping spheres of influence."

In a partnership, teachers and administrators create more *family-like* schools. A family-like school recognizes each child's individuality and makes each child feel special and included. Family-like schools welcome all families, not just those that are easy to reach. In a partnership, parents create more *school-like* families. A school-like family recognizes that each child is also a student. Families reinforce the importance of school, homework, and activities that build student skills and feelings of success. Communities, including groups of parents working together, create school-like opportunities, events, and programs that reinforce, recognize and reward students for good progress, creativity, contributions, and excellence. Communities also create *family-like* settings, services, and events to enable families to better support their children. *Community-minded* families and students help their neighborhoods and other families. The concept of a community school is reemerging. It refers to a place where programs and services for students, parents, and others are offered before, during, and after the regular school day.

Schools and communities talk about programs and services that are "family-friendly"—meaning that they take into account the needs and realities of family life in the 1990's, are feasible to conduct, and are equitable toward all families. When all these concepts combine, children experience *learning communities* or *caring communities*.

All these terms are consistent with the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, but they are not abstract concepts. You will find them daily in conversations, news stories, and celebrations of many kinds . . . Once people hear about such concepts as family-like schools or school-like families, they remember positive examples of schools, teachers, and places in the community that were "like a family" to them. They may remember how a teacher paid individual attention to them, recognized their uniqueness, or praised them for real progress, just as a parent might. Or they might recall things at home that were "just like school" and supported their work as a student, or they might remember community activities that made them feel smart or good about themselves and their families. They will recall that parents, siblings, and other family members engaged in and enjoyed educational activities and took pride in the good schoolwork or homework that they did, just as a teacher might.

### How Partnerships Work in Practice

These terms and examples are evidence of the *potential* for schools, families, and communities to create caring educational environments. It is possible to have a school that is excellent academically but ignores families. However, that school will build barriers between teachers, parents, and children—barriers that affect school life and learning. It is possible to have a school that is ineffective academically but involves families in many good ways. With its weak academic program, that school will shortchange students' learning. Neither of these schools exemplifies a caring educational environment that requires academic excellence, good communications, and productive interactions involving school, family, and community.

Some children succeed in school without much family involvement or despite family neglect or distress, particularly if the school has excellent academic and support programs. Teachers, relatives outside of the immediate family, other families, and members of the community can provide important guidance and encouragement to these students. As support from school, family, and community accumulates, significantly more students feel secure and cared for, understand the goals of education, work to achieve to their full potential, build positive attitudes and school behaviors, and stay in school. The shared interests and investments of schools, families, and communities create the conditions of caring that work to "overdetermine" the likelihood of student success.

Any practice can be designed and implemented well or poorly. And even well implemented partnership practices may not be useful to all families. In a caring school community, participants work continually to improve the nature and effects of partnerships. Although the interactions of educators, parents, students, and community members will not always be smooth or successful, partnership programs establish a base of respect and trust on which to build. Good partnerships withstand questions, conflicts, debates, and disagreements; provide structures and processes to solve problems; and are maintained—even strengthened—after differences have been resolved. Without this firm base, disagreements and problems that are sure to arise about schools and students will be harder to solve.

### What Research Says

In surveys and field studies involving teachers, parents, and students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, some important patterns relating to partnerships have emerged.

- Partnerships tend to decline across the grades, *unless* schools and teachers work to develop and implement appropriate practices of partnership at each grade level.

- Affluent communities currently have more positive family involvement, on average, *unless* schools and teachers in economically distressed communities work to build positive partnerships with their students' families.

- Schools in more economically depressed communities make more contact with families about the problems and difficulties their children are having, *unless* they work at developing balanced partnership programs that include contacts about positive accomplishments of students.

- Single parents, parents who are employed outside the home, parents who live far from the school, and fathers are less involved, on average, at the school building, *unless* the school organizes opportunities for families to volunteer at various times and in various places to support the school and their children.

Researchers have also drawn the following conclusions.

- Just about all families care about their children, want them to succeed, and are eager to obtain better information from schools and communities so as to remain good partners in their children's education.

- Just about all teachers and administrators would like to involve families, but many do not know how to go about building positive and productive programs and are consequently fearful about trying. This creates a "rhetoric rut," in which educators are stuck, expressing support for partnerships without taking any action.

- Just about all students at all levels—elementary, middle, and high school—want their families to be more knowledgeable partners about schooling and are willing to take active roles in assisting communications between home and school. However, students need much better information and guidance than most now receive about how their schools view partnerships and about how they can conduct important exchanges with their families about school activities, homework, and school decisions.

The research results are important because they indicate that caring communities can be built, on purpose; that they include families that might not become involved on their own; and that, by their own reports, just about all families, students, and teachers believe that partnerships are important for helping students succeed across the grades.

## Six Types of Involvement; Six Types of Caring

A framework of six major types of involvement has evolved from many studies and from many years of work by educators and families in elementary, middle, and high schools. The framework (summarized in the accompanying tables) helps educators develop more comprehensive programs of school and family partnerships and also helps researchers locate their questions and results in ways that inform and improve practice.

Each type of involvement includes many different *practices* of partnership. Each type presents particular *challenges* that must be met in order to involve all families and needed *redefinitions* of some basic principles of involvement. Finally, each type is likely to lead to different *results* for students, for parents, for teaching practice, and for school climate. Thus, schools have choices about which practices will help achieve important goals. The tables provide examples of practices, challenges for successful implementation, redefinitions for up-to-date understanding, and results that have been documented and observed.

## Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement

| Type 1 | Type 2 | Type 3 | Type 4 | Type 5 | Type 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Parenting** | **Communicating** | **Volunteering** | **Learning at Home** | **Decision Making** | **Collaborating with Community** |
| Help all families establish home environments to support children as students. | Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress. | Recruit and organize parent help and support. | Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. | Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives. | Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. |

| **Parenting** | **Communicating at Home** | **Volunteering** | **Learning** | **Decision Making** | **Collaborating with Community** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Challenges** | **Challenges** | **Challenges** | **Challenges** | **Challenges** | **Challenges** |
| Provide information to all families who want it or who need it, not just to the few who can attend workshops or meetings at the school building.<br>Enable families to share information with schools about culture, background, children's talents and needs.<br>Make sure that all information for and from families is clear, usable, and linked to children's success in school. | Review the readability, clarity, form, and frequency of all memos, notices, and other print and nonprint communications.<br>Consider parents who do not speak English well, do not read well, or need large type.<br>Review the quality of major communications (newsletters, report cards, conference schedules, and so on).<br>Establish clear channels for communications. | Recruit volunteers widely so that all families know that their time and talents are welcome.<br>Make flexible schedules for volunteers, assemblies, and events to enable parents who work to participate.<br>Organize volunteer work; provide training; match time and talents with school, teacher, and student needs; recognize efforts so that participants are productive. | Design and organize a regular schedule of interactive homework that gives *students* the responsibility for discussing important things they are learning and helps families stay aware of the content of their children's classwork.<br>Coordinate family-linked homework activities, if students have several teachers.<br>Involve families in all important decisions. | Include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and other groups in the school.<br>Offer training to enable leaders to serve as representatives of other families, with input from and return of information to all parents.<br>Include students (along with parents) in decision-making groups. | Solve turf problems of responsibilities, funds, staff, and locations for activities.<br>Inform families of community programs for students, such as mentoring, tutoring, and business partnerships.<br>Assure equity of opportunities for students and families to participate in community programs or to obtain services.<br>Match contributions with school goals. |
| **Redefinitions** | **Redefinitions** | **Redefinitions** | **Redefinitions** | **Redefinitions** | **Redefinitions** |
| "Workshop" to mean more than a *meeting* about a topic held at the school building at a particular time. "Workshop" may also mean making information about a topic available in a variety of forms that can be viewed, heard, or read anywhere, any time, in varied forms. | "Communication about school programs and student progress" to mean two-way, three-way, and many-way channels of communication that connect schools, families, students, and the community. | "Volunteer" to mean anyone who supports school goals and children's learning or development in any way, or any place, and at any time—not just during the school day and at the school building. | "Homework" to mean not only work done alone, but also interactive activities shared with others at home or in the community, linking schoolwork to real life.<br>"Help at home" to mean encouraging, listening, reacting, praising, guiding, monitoring, and discussing—not "teaching" school subjects. | "Decision making" to mean a process of partnership, of shared views and actions toward shared goals, not just a power struggle between conflicting ideas.<br>Parent "leader" to mean a real representative, with opportunities and support to hear from and communicate with other families. | "Community" to mean any neighborhoods that influence learning and development.<br>"Community" rated not only by low or high social or economic qualities, but by strengths to support students, families, and schools.<br>"Community" means all who are interested in and affected by the quality of education. |

| **Parenting** | **Communicating at Home** | **Volunteering** | **Learning** | **Decision Making** | **Collaborating with Community** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Results for Students** | **Results for Students** | **Results for Students** | **Results for Students** | **Results for Students** | **Results for Students** |
| Awareness of family supervision and respect for parents.<br>Positive personal qualities, habits, beliefs, and values, as taught by family.<br>Balance between time spent on chores, on other activities, and on homework.<br>Good or improved attendance. | Awareness of own progress and of actions needed to maintain or improve grades.<br>Understanding of school policies on behavior, attendance, and other areas of student conduct.<br>Informed decisions about courses and programs.<br>Awareness of own role in partnerships. | Skill in communicating with adults.<br>Increased learning of skills that receive tutoring or targeted attention from volunteers.<br>Awareness of many skills, talents, occupations, and contributions of parents and other volunteers. | Gains in skills, abilities, and test scores linked to homework and classwork.<br>Homework completion.<br>Positive attitude toward schoolwork.<br>View of parent as more similar to teacher and of home as more similar to school.<br>Self-concept of ability as learner. | Awareness of representation of families in school decisions.<br>Understanding that student rights are protected.<br>Specific benefits linked to policies enacted by parent organizations and experienced by students. | Increased skills and talents through enriched curricular and extracurricular experiences.<br>Awareness of careers and of options for future education and work.<br>Specific benefits linked to programs, services, resources, and opportunities that connect students with community. |
| **Results for Parents** | **Results for Parents** | **Results for Parents** | **Results for Parents** | **Results for Parents** | **Results for Parents** |
| Understanding of and confidence about parenting, child and adolescent development, and changes in home conditions for learning as children proceed through school.<br>Awareness of own and others' challenges in parenting.<br>Feeling of support from school and other parents | Understanding school programs and policies.<br>Monitoring and awareness of child's progress.<br>Responding effectively to students' problems.<br>Interactions with teachers and ease of communication with school and teachers. | Understanding teacher's job, increased comfort in school, and carry-over of school activities at home.<br>Self-confidence about ability to work in school and with children or to take steps to improve own education.<br>Awareness that families are welcome and valued at school.<br>Gains in specific skills of volunteer work. | Know how to support, encourage, and help student at home each year.<br>Discussions of school, classwork, and homework.<br>Understanding of instructional program and of what child is learning.<br>Appreciation of teaching skills.<br>Awareness of child as a learner. | Input into policies that affect child's education.<br>Feeling of ownership of school.<br>Awareness of parents' voices in school decisions.<br>Shared experiences and connections with other families.<br>Awareness of school, district, and state policies. | Knowledge and use of local resources by family and child to increase skills and talents or to obtain needed services.<br>Interactions with other families in community activities.<br>Awareness of school's role in the community and of community's contributions to the school. |

| **Parenting** | **Communicating at Home** | **Volunteering** | **Learning** | **Decision Making** | **Collaborating with Community** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Results for Teachers** | **Results for Teachers** | **Results for Teachers** | **Results for Teachers** | **Results for Teachers** | **Results for Teachers** |
| Understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, concerns, goals, needs, and views of their children.<br>Respect for families' strengths and efforts.<br>Understanding of student diversity.<br>Awareness of own skills to share information on child development. | Increased diversity and use of communications with families and awareness of own ability to communicate clearly.<br>Appreciation for and use of parent network for communications.<br>Increased ability to elicit and understand family views on children's programs and progress. | Readiness to involve families in new ways, including those who do not volunteer at school.<br>Awareness of parents' talents and interests in school and children.<br>Greater individual attention to students, with help from volunteers. | Better design of homework assignments.<br>Respect of family time.<br>Recognition of equal helpfulness of single-parent, dual-income, and less formally educated families in motivating and reinforcing student learning.<br>Satisfaction with family involvement and support. | Awareness of parent perspectives as a factor in policy development and decisions.<br>View of equal status of family representatives on committees and in leadership roles. | Awareness of community resources to enrich curriculum and instruction.<br>Openness to and skill in using mentors, business partners, community volunteers, and others to assist students and augment teaching practice.<br>Knowledgeable, helpful referrals of children and families to needed services. |

## Resources

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# early years are learning years

## Parents as partners in children's learning

Parents and teachers may look at young children's learning from different perspectives, but they share a common goal: making sure that children receive the best possible education. Mutual respect and communication between programs and families takes advantage of both perspectives to provide children with the kind of care and education that will help them thrive.

Today's family members and caregivers have many responsibilities and time constraints. It takes extra effort on both sides to build strong partnerships.

**Tips for caregivers and teachers:**

- **Listen** carefully to parents—they are experts on their own children, too. Families can provide important information on a child's behavior outside the program or classroom.
- **Be sensitive** to different cultures and child-rearing beliefs. Never make judgements on parenting styles: always make an effort to respect the family's values and beliefs.
- **Share** pertinent information about the child on a daily basis, especially in programs caring for infants and toddlers. An established system for keeping records and reporting to parents about each child is key to good communications.
- **Welcome** parents into the program or classroom. Ask parents to drop by for lunch or snack, or arrange afterwork events like socials or potluck dinners. Working around parents' busy schedules sends a message of being sensitive to families' needs.
- **Communicate** with parents about children's assignments or activities ahead of time. This will allow parents to set time aside for working with their child or coordinate family schedules with school expectations. Parents also appreciate regular, meaningful progress reports early in the year with time and recommendations to help prepare children for the next levels of their education.

**Tips for parents:**

- **Listen** carefully to what your child's teacher or caregiver has to say. Remember that they spend a significant amount of time with children and share expertise about their development.
- **Don't jump** to conclusions. If you have questions or concerns about your child or the early childhood program, speak directly to your child's teacher, caregivers or program supervisor. Don't panic or merely commiserate with other parents when questions arise.
- **Remember** that many teachers or caregivers have families of their own, and may share similar responsibilities and time constraints. Be as respectful of their time as you wish them to be of yours.

Many early childhood programs today are working hard to become more "family-friendly," providing newsletters to parents that focus on staff members and professional development, ensuring one positive phone call per child each semester, or even providing voice mail for parents to leave messages after working hours. Programs may demonstrate strengths in different ways, but working together with parents remains crucial. When teachers or caregivers make the extra effort to include parents in program activities, and parents take the time to attend and participate, children benefit from the best possible learning experience.

A special thanks to Deborah Eaton and Beth Bye for help in preparing this release.
Release #17

**naeyc** NATIONAL ASSOCIATION for the EDUCATION of YOUNG CHILDREN, 1509 16th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036-1426
202-232-8777, 800-424-2460, FAX: 202-328-1846

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**ERIC** Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
University of Illinois
51 Gerty Drive
Champaign, Illinois 61820-7469

Phone: (800) 583-4135
(217) 333-1386
Fax: (217) 333-3767
Email: ericeece@uiuc.edu

# GRANDPARENTS AS PARENTS: A PRIMER FOR SCHOOLS

*Dianne Rothenberg*

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An increasing number of American grandparents are finding their later years different from what they expected. Instead of a quiet retirement, sweetened by delights of occasional visits with grandchildren, many grandparents have taken on the role of surrogate parents to their grandchildren. Reasons behind this trend involve a variety of family circumstances, including the death of one or both parents, parental abandonment, the high incidence of divorce, an increase in the number of never-married mothers (especially teen mothers), parental imprisonment, drug addiction, or mental illness. The AIDS epidemic also plays a role in this increasing shift of responsibility for child rearing. The Orphan Project of New York City (1995) estimates that 75,000 to 125,000 children will be orphaned by the year 2000 because their mothers have died of HIV/AIDS.

Recent legislative activity is also likely to contribute to an increase in the number of grandparent-grandchild families in the future. The amended September 1995 Social Security Act requires states to specify adult relatives as the first foster care option; the Kinship Care Act of 1996 (introduced by Senator Wyden of Oregon and recently referred to the Senate Committee on Finance) puts grandparents first in line as potential foster care parents and adoptive parents for grandchildren who, for safety reasons, have been removed from their parents' home.

In short, while grandparents have often raised their grandchildren in times of family crisis, the proportion of families in crisis situations is growing. A 40 percent increase in grandchildren living in their grandparents' homes, many without their parents, was reported between 1980 and 1990 (de Toledo & Brown, 1995). Families made up of grandparents and their grandchildren are just one of the diverse family structures with which schools are learning to work.

## THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF GRANDPARENTS AS PARENTS

The National Center for Health Statistics (Saluter, 1996) reported that 3.735 million children under the age of 18 (5.4 percent) live in the home of their grandparent or grandparents, and that black children are more likely (13 percent) to live with a grandparent than white children (3.9 percent) or Hispanic children (5.7 percent). While nearly half the grandparent households with a grandchild include the child's mother, about a million families in the United States are made up of grandparents raising their grandchildren without one of the children's parents (Takas, 1995). Thus, about 1 in 20 children under 18 lives in a home headed by a grandparent without parents present.

Grandparents serving as surrogate parents represent all socioeconomic and ethnic groups. Most families headed by grandparents live in an urban setting and have less than a high school education, and more such families live in the south (57 percent) than in all other areas of the United States combined (Turner, 1995).

## HOW SCHOOLS CAN HELP

Schools can contribute significantly to helping grandparents cope with the stresses of parenting a second time around. As a basis for understanding and helping, school personnel may need to learn to recognize and accept strong feelings experienced by each member of the grandparent-parent-child triad. *Grandparents* (even those who find great satisfaction in raising their grandchildren) often feel disappointment mixed with anger, blame, guilt, and serious concern about family finances. *Parents* usually have ambivalent feelings of gratitude and resentment, as they grieve the loss of their child even if they recognize that the decision to remove the child from their care is in the child's best interest. Often, resentment deepens as estrangement widens. *Children* raised by grandparents may express feelings of abandonment, even though they are grateful to their grandparents for taking care of them (Saltzman & Pakan, 1996). Grandparent and grandchild interactions with noncustodial parents can be supportive or damaging to all the parties involved.

## SCHOOL STRATEGIES INTENDED TO HELP GRANDPARENTS

Schools can use many strategies to support grandparents who are working to raise and educate their grandchildren. Many schools may find the following list of suggestions useful.

*Examine school policies on enrollment.* Existing policies may need revision to accommodate the realities of children living with their grandparents. For example, in some districts, once the grandparent has informal authority from the parent or legal authority, he or she is able to enroll the child in school, review the child's records, and make any requests or decisions about the child's education (American Association of Retired Persons [AARP], 1993). In other districts, formal guardianship is required for anyone other than a parent to make school decisions on behalf of the child.

*Have helpful information on hand for grandparents acting as parents.* School counselors may want to write to the organizations in the Resource List accompanying this digest for more information on parenting the second time around, and they may want to share it with teachers and grandparents acting as parents. They may want to check with local social service agencies to find out about support groups and "reparenting" or "grandparenting" classes for grandparents raising a second family. Such services may help reduce the isolation that is commonly cited as a major problem for grandparents raising their grandchildren (de Toledo & Brown, 1995).

*Keep in mind that short-term "respite care" for young and school-age children often tops the "wish list" of grandparent caregivers* (Turner, 1995). If they do not already routinely do so, schools can prepare information in advance on before- and after-school programs, on lunch and breakfast programs, and on Head Start or other preschool programs for all families.

*Be sure that school policy supports appropriate referrals for educational, health, and social services, as needed.* Grandparents may not be aware of services available to help their grandchild academically or to help the child deal with emotional and psychological problems. Eligibility for such services may be in question in some situations, yet many grandparent-grandchild families are particularly in need of this kind of assistance (AARP, 1993).

*Keep in mind that school may be a much different place from the schools that grandparents remember.* Schools might consider scheduling extra time for grandparent teacher conferences, letting grandparents know how to reach the teacher not only when there is a problem but at any time, and encouraging grandparents to volunteer at school to gain a sense of current school practices.

*Use "family-friendly" strategies to encourage surrogate parents to take an active role in their children's education.* These strategies include using inclusive language on home-school communications. Schools might want to stress to teachers the importance of understanding how the child views his or her primary caregiver. When the teacher is sending home important notices, the teacher needs to know whether it is "Grandmommy" or "Poppa" who will need to read, sign, and return the forms. The child and his or her classmates need to hear the teacher's accurate acknowledgment of this important relationship.

## SCHOOL STRATEGIES INTENDED TO HELP GRANDCHILDREN

Schools can also help children cope with the stresses of adjusting to their living arrangements. The strategies listed here particularly affect the children.

*Anticipate transitional or adjustment difficulties and act to minimize them.* If a grandchild has only recently come into the grandparents' home, he or she may need time to adjust to a new routine, including expectations that he or she will attend school regularly and complete schoolwork.

*Look for children's strengths and build on them.* As many as two-thirds of children who have grown up in difficult circumstances have within them the resilience to grow up to lead healthy, productive lives (Benard, 1991). With support and sensitivity, these children can often meet teachers' expectations.

*Place children living with grandparents with the most stable and experienced teachers.* Whether because of long-term family instability or recent sudden trauma, children living with their grandparents may not only need extra attention during the school year but also the classroom stability that an experienced teacher can provide.

*Try not to single out children because of their family status in front of peers or other teachers.* Shame and the feeling of being different from their peers, however unjustified, can contribute to a difficult school adjustment for these children.

## CONCLUSION

Children from families headed by grandparents constitute a growing proportion of students in schools, and their numbers can be expected to continue to increase. Schools that recognize and support these nontraditional families will be able to provide better service to their communities.

See the *Grandparents as Parents Resource List* of related publications and organizations.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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# III. Helping Families Understand Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Schools, families, and communities have academic, social, emotional, and physical expectations for young children. Parents need to be aware what expectations are appropriate. "For too many parents, information about schools and classroom practices has been limited to what is reported by the media. Typically, information in the news highlights major controversies with a focus on extreme positions and gives parents little guidance on how to figure out what is going on in their own child's classroom. Parents interpret what they see based on the impressions they developed as students themselves and a vision of school that is both incomplete and perhaps twenty-five to thirty-five years out of date. (They) wouldn't want a doctor to treat (them) using only information known and practiced a quarter of a century ago. Similarly, our children deserve an education based on the accumulated research of many years and on the best practices of teachers and schools across the country" (Bickart, et.al., p. xv-xvi). Ongoing communication between school and home helps families understand and support developmentally appropriate practice.

During the school year, communication with parents can be an everyday activity. It can occur naturally when the child is brought to school by the parent or when the parent drops by to bring something the child forgot. Although most of these exchanges are casual, they can be valuable. Even if a teacher is too busy at that time to talk with parents at any length, she can convey a positive and informative message.

Weekly newsletters are a way to keep families in touch with classroom and school activities. They can contain news about classroom happenings, student writings, and helpful hints for parents. Informative articles can be attached that support what is being done in the classroom. Setting up a parents' bulletin board in the classroom or hallway is another way to highlight parenting articles, weekly newsletters, parenting suggestions, and a calendar of events.

Home/School Journals (Fisher, 1988) are a way for families and teachers to maintain a dialogue about a child. The teacher can share with the parents positive information about their child and the classroom. The parents and family members can share things that the child does at home and ask questions about their child and classroom activities.

A monthly parent meeting can be a time for parents to come together and share ideas and concerns about issues facing them at home with their children. The parents decide upon the topics they wish to discuss based on their interests and needs. Casual clothing and snacks add to the informal atmosphere of the meeting.

The following story, "The Metamorphosis of Mary," is a kindergarten teacher's reflection of Mary, the parent of a child in her classroom. The story describes how Mary's thoughts and beliefs about the education of her child changed over the course of the year. This is followed by excerpts from the journal Mary kept during the year her child was in kindergarten. The names have been changed throughout the pieces to respect the confidentiality of the family.

*"Ongoing communication between school and home helps families understand and support developmentally appropriate practice."*

# THE METAMORPHOSIS OF MARY

Teacher Story

I remember very clearly the day I met Mary. It was the first day of school in my kindergarten class, and she came in with her son, Jimmy. It was her first day at school as a parent. She smiled and introduced me to Jimmy. Then, she asked me the big question, "Just what are you going to do with my child?"

I don't know what I said to her that day, but I know she got involved right away as a weekly parent-helper. Direct involvement in the classroom is very worthwhile. If "a picture is worth a thousand words," then a first hand experience is worth more than anything that can be said.

Mary always asked a lot of questions. She read the articles we gave her and the newsletters we sent home. She frequently made comparisons between education as she had experienced it and the developmentally appropriate practices being used in Jimmy's classroom. She asked more questions. Mary struggled to understand the most effective ways to support her child's work at school and at home. She wanted to control what her son did, but she began to try some of the new approaches she was learning about and seeing used in the classroom.

Mary started to see articles in parent magazines and women's magazines about changing educational practices, and she brought them in to us. We often shared the articles Mary found with our other parents.

Watching Mary transform her thinking about education, as she gained new information and experiences, was like watching the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly. The American Heritage Dictionary (1978) defines metamorphosis as "a change in the structure and habits of a creature during normal growth." Discussing her questions and sharing information with her helped me clarify my own beliefs and understanding about appropriate educational practices.

What got this parent involved in changing her thinking about education? Was it her questions? Was it her experience in the classroom every week? Was it the "*Positive Parenting Workshops*?" Was it reading the articles from the early childhood and parent magazines? Was it the willingness of the school to answer her questions and invite discussion? Was it her tenacity to find out "just what we were going to do with her child?" Yes, it was! It was all of these!

# MARY'S JOURNAL

Parent Story

***August***
*Jimmy received a letter from his kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Long, today. Her letter sounded very positive and upbeat. I can't decide which of us is more nervous about the beginning of kindergarten me or Jimmy. Wouldn't it be funny if he gets to use the same blue workbooks that I did? How much can kindergarten change? Surely, it can't be that different. If his teacher can just keep him sitting at his desk for 2 1/2 hours, then I am sure everything will be fine, I hope.*

***October***
*Well, I spent this morning at kindergarten with Jimmy as a "parent helper." I have to say I have some real doubts about this teacher of his. Mrs. Long seems like such a nice person, but her views on kindergarten are **way** out there. There are **no** desks in the classroom! How can these children possibly learn anything when they are all sitting at tables together? Instead of a classroom, it looks like an indoor playground. They have blocks, paint, a little play kitchen, dress up clothes, and the list goes on. Where are the workbooks and worksheets? How is Jimmy supposed to learn anything about numbers and the alphabet by playing with toys? The look on my face must have reflected my shock, because she did tell me that they were playing with manipulatives, whatever those are! My main concern remains, how is he supposed to learn anything by playing, when I have spent all summer getting him ready for kindergarten by telling him how hard he is going to have to work in there? I'm definitely going to have to keep an eye on this classroom.*

***January***
*Christmas break was his first chance to show off his "smarts," and I have to admit that his teacher was right about learning from "play." I never would have believed that he could learn to count by stacking blocks, or how colors are made by mixing paints. He is definitely writing more and more. Although, I think, I need to go back to school to take a lesson in learning to read his kindergarten writing! It took me at least ten minutes to figure out that "NOWAIAMGOWG2WAT" really said, "No way. I am going to wait." He is definitely getting the idea about spelling. I just need to get the idea about reading it.*

*It amazes me that kindergarten was ever taught any other way. He is surrounded by all different forms of language, from individual letters to whole sentences, and he feels comfortable working at his own pace. It is wonderful and sad at the same time. Wonderful, because he can go as far and as fast as he can. Sad, because I wonder how far I could have gone at his age if my teacher didn't have the "sit down, we're going to learn now" mentality and had allowed us to stretch our minds as far as we could.*

***April***
*Well, all of us parents got a chance to meet the first grade teachers at a meeting at school tonight. I feel like I am in a time warp because I have the same feelings about Jimmy going on to first grade that I did when he started kindergarten The first grade teachers all seem very nice, but they are definitely not big supporters of a developmental program. I started out thinking Mrs. Long was nuts to try and teach the way she does. Now, I wonder why everyone doesn't teach this way.*

***June***

*Jimmy is officially a first grader! The change in him has been tremendous over the past year. He has learned so much by being in Mrs. Long's class and I think I have learned even more. It amazes me that "teaching" has changed so much from when I was in kindergarten. For Jimmy to be surrounded by all the aspects of language, math, art, science and culture just amazes me. I look at simple things in a new light. He learned how to measure by cooking and playing in the sandbox, how to count by sorting different color blocks, how to anticipate numbers in a sequence by using a calendar and how to read and write just because he was surrounded by all different kinds of songs and words and stories. The best part is that there was no comparing himself to the other kids. They all learned it when they were ready, not when Mrs. Long told them to. Mrs. Long told me her main goal is to expose them to as much as possible in class and then get out of the way and let them learn. What a wonderful gift!*

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University of Illinois
51 Gerty Drive
Champaign, Illinois 61820-7469

Phone: (800) 583-4135
(217) 333-1386
Fax: (217) 333-3767
Email: ericeece@uiuc.edu

# PREVENTING AND RESOLVING PARENT-TEACHER DIFFERENCES

*Lilian G. Katz, Amy Aidman, Debbie A. Reese, and Ann-Marie Clark*

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Parents and teachers share responsibility for creating a working relationship that fosters children's learning. This digest examines the cultural context for parent-teacher relationships, suggests some general strategies for creating a climate in which misunderstandings and disagreements between parents and teachers can be minimized through communication, and discusses some general principles for parents and teachers in dealing with misunderstandings or disagreements as they arise.

## THE CULTURAL CONTEXT FOR PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

It is important for teachers and parents to remember that they know the child in different contexts, and that each may be unaware of what the child is like in the other context. It is also useful to keep in mind generally that different people often have distinct but disparate perspectives on the same issue.

For many parents, a fundamental part of the parenting role is to be their child's strongest advocate with the teacher and the school (Katz, 1995). Other parents, however, may be reluctant to express their concerns because of cultural beliefs related to the authoritative position of the teacher. Others may have difficulty talking with teachers as a result of memories of their own school years, or they may be unsure of how to express their concerns to teachers. A few parents may fear that questions or criticism will put their child at a disadvantage in school.

Many parents may be surprised to learn that teachers, especially new teachers, are sometimes equally anxious about encounters with parents. Most teachers have received very little training in fostering parent-teacher relationships, but with the growing understanding of the importance of parent involvement, they may worry about doing everything they can to encourage parents to feel welcome (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991).

## AVOIDING CONFLICTS BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS THROUGH OPEN, ONGOING COMMUNICATION

The foundation for good parent-teacher relationships is frequent and open communication. Both teachers and parents share the responsibility for creating such a foundation. There are several strategies teachers can use to establish a climate conducive to open communication. Teachers can:

*Let parents know how and when they can contact the school and the teacher.* As early in the school year as possible, teachers can explain that: (1) they can be reached at specific times or in specific ways; (2) they can be contacted directly as questions or concerns arise; and (3) they have given a lot of thought to their teaching philosophy, class rules, and expectations. In addition to personal interaction, teachers often use newsletters or letters home to provide this information to parents, perhaps including a phone number and, if available, an electronic mail address by which they can be contacted (Barnett, 1995). Some teachers encourage two-way communication by including in newsletters or letters home a short survey about children's interests or parents' hopes or expectations for the school year.

*Practice an open-door, open-mind policy.* Teachers can invite parents to visit the class at any time that is convenient to the parent. When they visit, parents can monitor their child's perceptions of a situation and see for themselves what the teacher is trying to achieve with his or her students.

*Elicit expressions of parents' concerns and interests in preparation for parent-teacher conferences.* Some schools organize parent-teacher meetings to discuss their goals early in the school year. On these occasions, teachers can ask parents to share their main concerns and goals for their child. Brief questionnaires and interest surveys also provide good bases for meaningful discussions in parent-teacher conferences (Nielsen & Finkelstein, 1993).

*Involve parents in classroom activities.* Teachers can let parents know how they can be helpful and solicit parents' assistance with specific activities. The more involved parents are in what goes on in the classroom, the more likely they are to understand the teacher's goals and practices.

Parents also have an important role to play in fostering open communication between themselves and teachers. They can:

*Introduce themselves.* At the beginning of the school year, parents can contact teachers and let them know when they can be reached most easily, daytime or evening, to discuss their child's classroom experience, and how they would prefer to be contacted (telephone, e-mail, letter, etc.).

*Be involved in classroom and school activities at whatever level work and family responsibilities allow.* If parents cannot volunteer or go on field trips, they can let the teacher know that they are interested in helping in other ways with a special display or some activity that can be done on an occasional weekend, for example. They can let the teacher know that they have skills that they would be willing to share even if they are not sure how they can be useful in the classroom. Or, they can let the teacher know that special circumstances (an extremely ill parent, or an especially demanding job, for example) prevent them from being formally involved, but that they are always interested in how their child is doing and would welcome communications about their child on a regular basis, not just when there's a problem.

*Initiate regular contact.* Parents need not wait for the teacher to call them; they can contact the teacher at times the teacher has indicated are convenient.

## WHEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS DISAGREE: STRATEGIES FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS

On those inevitable occasions when parents and teachers disagree about curriculum, assignments, peer relationships, homework, or teaching approaches, a pattern of open communication can be invaluable for resolving differences (Willis, 1995). But dealing with direct disagreements also requires respect and discretion by both parents and teachers. In times of disagreement, teachers should:

*Know the school policy for addressing parent-teacher disagreements.* It is a good idea for teachers to check school and district policies for handling conflicts or disagreements with parents and to follow the procedures outlined in the policies.

*Use discretion about when and where children and their families are discussed.* It is important to resist the frequent temptations to discuss individual children and their families in inappropriate public and social situations or to discuss particular children with the parents of other children. Confidentiality contributes to maintaining trust between parents and teachers.

Parents' discussions of disagreements with teachers need to be based on knowing the facts. Parents can:

*Talk directly with the teacher about the problem.* The best approach is to address complaints at first directly to the teacher, either in person or by telephone, and then to other school personnel in the order specified by school policy. Sometimes the teacher is unaware of the child's difficulty or perception of a situation. Sometimes a child misunderstands a teacher's intentions, or the teacher is unaware of the child's confusion about a rule or an assignment. It is important to check the facts directly with the teacher before drawing conclusions or allocating blame. Direct contact is necessary to define the problem accurately and to develop an agreement about how best to proceed.

*Avoid criticizing teachers in front of children.* Criticizing teachers and schools in front of children may confuse them. Even very young children can pick up disdain or frustration that parents express about their children's school experiences. In the case of the youngest children, it is not unusual for them to attribute heroic qualities to their teachers. Some even think that the teacher lives at school and thinks of no one but them! Eventually such naivete is outgrown, but overheard criticism is likely to be confusing in the early years and may put a child in a bind over divided loyalties. Besides causing confusion and conflict, criticizing the teacher in front of the child does nothing to address the problem. In the case of older children, such criticism may foster arrogance, defiance, and rudeness toward teachers. Children's respect for authority figures is generally a shared goal in most cultures (Katz, 1996).

*Choose an appropriate time and place to discuss the disagreement.* Parents should keep in mind that the end of the day, when both teachers and parents are tired, is probably not the best time for a discussion involving strong feelings. If an extended discussion is needed, make an appointment with the teacher.

As children grow older, they are generally aware when their parents are upset about the teacher or a school-related problem. As parents discuss these incidents with their children, they are modeling ways to express frustration with the problems of life in group settings. As children observe and then practice these skills, the coping skills become "tools" in a child's "psychological pocket" to be used in future life experiences.

## CONCLUSION

Teachers and parents share responsibility for the education and socialization of children. Preventing and resolving the differences that may arise between parents, teachers, and children with constructive communication, respect, grace, and good humor can help make school a pleasant place.

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# IV. Challenges Facing Children and Families

Many children face life challenges that can present obstacles in their academic, social, and emotional development. Domestic and social violence, family substance abuse, lack of parental involvement, poverty, and death of a loved one are examples of some experiences that can produce stress. Teachers need to be aware of the effects such challenges may have on their children.

"Teachers need to guard against being judgmental in responding to what children bring into the classroom about their families. Some of the experiences children share may be shocking and distressing: having a family member arrested or shot, or seeing physical violence in the home, for example. If our own discomfort leads us to say that those stories do not belong in school, we negate a part of children's lives. Thereafter, they may hide this part of their lives and lose their sense of belonging at school. Teachers can help children by being good listeners and responding to how the child is feeling: 'That must be very upsetting. I'm glad you're safe.'" (Trister Dodge, et. al., 1994, p. 230).

A teacher's best resource for helping children deal with challenges that may occur is open communication with families. "While no one can keep meetings completely positive when difficult subjects are being discussed, it helps to state certain things specifically, even though they may seem obvious: (1) Acknowledge that you and the parents share a concern for their child . . . *(2)(E)mpathize, empathize, empathize* with the parents' dilemma and express loving concern for their child . . . (3) Acknowledge that this isn't easy for you . . . (4) No matter how gentle you are, be prepared for parents to feel some anger. Try to remain empathetic and remind them that you share with them a common concern for their child. Express your appreciation and love for their child. When parents are upset, it may be difficult for them to 'hear' you the first time. This can happen even when the parent has brought a problem to your attention! Stay focused on what you have seen and what you have heard" (Manning & Schindler, 1997, p. 29-30).

On the following pages, there are articles and excerpts dealing with family and childhood challenges. Dr. Robert W. Burke discusses some of the common sources of childhood stress and how teachers can help. Selections are also included to assist teachers and schools when dealing with a child who is grieving due to the loss or critical illness of a loved one. At the end of the section there is a piece by NAEYC, *Early Years are Learning Years: Media Violence and Young Children.*

> *"Many children face life challenges that can present obstacles in their academic, social, and emotional development. . . . Teachers need to be aware of the effects such challenges may have on their children."*

# DISTRESSED FAMILIES AND TROUBLED CHILDREN

*Robert W. Burke, Ph.D.*
*Ball State University*

Anyone who even casually examines American culture is left with a clear impression that, in some fundamental ways, our country has gone through radical changes in the past thirty years. Hamburg (1994), in his analysis of our changing society and the resultant impacts on children, notes that "families are living in a time of flux. It is a time of magnificent opportunities and insidious stress" (p. 11). For any professional working within schools, these societal changes are seen and felt in the lives of the children who come to school every day. Brenner (1984) observes, "People who work with children report an uneasy sense that youngsters today have fewer sources of adult support, affirmation, and love than in the recent past" (p. 1). While some educators may have been able to adapt their teaching to meet the changing needs of contemporary children, others of us may be struggling in our attempts to do our best teaching with and for every child. For early childhood professionals to find and maintain both personal and professional balance, it is important to understand what Hamburg refers to as "insidious stress."

The notion of "stress" is used in different ways. Recently, considerable research has been conducted into the effects of life experiences on children's growth and development. For some authors, "stress" includes the necessary, life-enhancing, common tensions of daily life; in this sense, stress is not only positive, it is a necessary condition. Only when stress becomes excessive does it become negative, a condition called "distress." Other authors, however, use the word "stress" to include an entire range of experience that affects a person; here, stress can be either good or bad. All agree that stress is a life experience that can affect all aspects of a person: mental, physical, and/or emotional. Arnold (1990) states that "child stress might be defined as any intrusion into children's normal physical or psychosocial life experiences that acutely or chronically unbalances physiological or psychological equilibrium, threatens safety or security, or distorts physical or psychological growth/development, and the psychophysiological consequences of such intrusion or distortion" (p. 2). This comprehensive definition provides key features for educators to consider: the experience is intrusive; it disrupts normal physical and/or psychosocial development; it can be of short duration, but acute, or it can be chronic; and it threatens the child's sense of safety or security. Negative, severe stress on a child is a disruptive and potentially disabling condition that can have far-reaching effects. In this section of the guide, attention will be focused on typical and atypical sources of negative stress (distress) and their disturbing effects on children.

### Common Sources of Childhood Stress

To feel and cope with stress is a normal part of every person's life. Some experiences are shared by most people and, if considered carefully, can be viewed as stressful events for children (Brenner, 1984; Arent, 1984; Kuczen, 1987).

**Growing Up** is an ongoing stressful event. Childhood and adolescence involve a continual series of changes that affect all aspects of a person. Since we know that change in itself is stressful, it stands to reason that children will feel stress about the numerous changes they experience as they grow and develop.

**Family Life** is, among other things, a common stressful experience. To be a child member of a family means that one's own wants, needs, and interests have to be considered along with the needs of all other family members. A family's relative ability to function as a healthy unit will greatly influence the level of stress any given child experiences.

**Family Structure** is another dimension of life that has stress factors attached to it. Certain distinct features of family may impact a child's stress level. Two-parent families in which both parents are employed outside the home must learn how to deal with the daily stress of schedules, communication, transportation, and conflicting demands on time and energy. Single parents are faced on a daily basis with the need to balance numerous and possibly conflicting demands without the active support and participation of a partner/spouse. With only one parent available to make decisions, secure resources, and attend to the children's needs, it is not surprising that these family members feel an elevated level of stress. Non-traditional types of family structure are becoming increasingly common. Families headed by grandparents are increasing in number, as are families consisting of either two gay male or lesbian parents with their dependent children. Each type of family structure will contain its own unique mix of stressors and stress relievers. Children from nontraditional family structures that are perceived as unacceptable by the local community will have additional stress to bear (Burke, 1997).

**School** can be viewed as a common stress in the life of nearly all children. Although kindergarten is often the most stressful new school experience for children (and parents), each year in the primary grades is stressful because of the psychosocial demands of acclimating to a new teacher, class group, and set of expectations.

These life experiences are common to most children and adults. In healthy, well-functioning families the adults model appropriate and successful coping strategies, so that children learn to cope and life can continue along a fairly predictable, "normal" course.

### Sources of Severe Childhood Stress

Beyond the typical life experiences that have mild or moderate stress embedded in them, there are other circumstances and events that are especially distressing to children, and which can affect them in profound, negative ways. Early childhood teachers should be alert to children manifesting symptoms of these more disturbing stressors and, when necessary, intervene in appropriate ways.

**Separation** from significant adults or other family members is often experienced as a severe stressor by primary grade children. Brenner (1984) provides a useful list of long-term or permanent separation experiences that disrupt children's daily lives:

- separation by death of a parent, grandparent, or sibling
- separation by employment demands, such as a military assignment overseas
- separation by illness; hospitalization of either the child or parent because of mental or physical illness
- separation by incarceration of a parent
- separation by marital discord, including divorce

Regardless of the reason, the experience of separation is distressing to a child. While some separation experience (e.g., a parent delivering a child to the door of the kindergarten classroom) can be stressful, attention is being called here to those more severe events that are very disruptive and distressing to the child. Children whose lives are ruptured by separation from a significant adult will need your help to cope with the event. Do not expect rapid resolution of the child's distress; indeed, some events like a parental divorce will require years for the child to reestablish internal equilibrium (Arent, 1984).

**Parental alcoholism** (or other drug abuse) is a major cause of distress among contemporary American children. Brenner (1984) states that ***"the most widespread cause of severe stress for school-age children in the United States today is life with an alcoholic parent"*** (p. 151). For children growing up in a family in which one or both parents abuse alcohol (or any other drug), daily life is marked by uncertainty and unpredictability. Not only do these children miss out on a normal and healthy childhood due to the physical and/or psychological absence of the alcoholic parent, they often have the additional burden of fulfilling household and family tasks usually assumed by a parent. Nastasi and DeZolt (1994) comment that "alcoholism affects the lives of millions of children and families . . . these children (commonly referred to as children of alcoholics, COAs) are more likely to experience family disharmony and dysfunctional family relationships, to develop social-emotional and academic-occupational problems, and to become alcoholics ... COAs often go unrecognized and untreated" (p. vii).

Many alcoholism counselors agree that COAs adapt to the parental alcoholism by assuming one of four roles in the family. Wegscheider (1981) identifies these roles as the hero, the scapegoat, the lost child, and the mascot. The coping behaviors that may work within the alcoholic family can become dysfunctional when used in the classroom. Powell, Zehm, and Kottler (1995) emphasize that parental alcoholism will have a ripple effect in the classroom. They state ***"We (teachers) are spectacularly unprepared to deal with these problems. Teachers receive almost no training in understanding the mechanisms and***

***insidious effects of alcoholism, much less what to do about them . . . we learn very little about how to develop solid relationships with children, how to inspire their trust, and how to recognize their emotional, social, family, and self-esteem problems"*** (p. vii-ix).

**Child abuse and neglect**, in all forms, is an extremely distressing and sometimes life-threatening experience for a child. Annually, there are well over a million reported cases of child abuse and neglect in America (Arnold, 1990). Although media coverage tends to report on the most horrific cases of abuse, we must remember that children of all races, locations, and income levels are abused every day. Some types, such as physical abuse, are more readily apparent to a teacher. Other forms, such as emotional abuse, are less visible but have equally devastating consequences.

Symptoms of abuse can be briefly highlighted as follows (Brenner, 1984):

- **Physical Abuse:** bruises, welts, burns, broken bones, cuts, or starvation
- **Emotional Abuse:** inept social skills, rocking and sucking, angry or hostile, depressed, flat emotional response, unempathetic
- **Sexual Abuse:** fears of people or new places, age-inappropriate sexual knowledge, loss of bowel/bladder control, sleep disturbances, persistent sex play with toys or peers
- **Physical Neglect:** malnourished, underweight, dirty clothing, frequently tired
- **Educational Neglect:** erratic attendance

Children who are abused or neglected suffer dire consequences that can have lifelong effects. Teachers are required by Indiana State Law to report all suspected cases of abuse or neglect.

### How Teachers Can Help

Teachers can play a very important role in the life of a child who is troubled by any distressing circumstance. For children experiencing any of the severe stressors, teachers are encouraged to:

- make the time needed to get to know each child and his or her family
- learn all that you can about the particular life circumstance facing a child
- assume a position of advocacy for every child; remember that you may be the only adult to whom a child can turn
- remember that every child is unique; allow the child to process the stressor in his or her own way
- recognize that separation and trauma involve a loss for the child; losses need to be grieved, and children need help in this process
- realize that severe distress can affect a child in all dimensions: physically, psychologically, emotionally, academically, socially, and behaviorally
- provide a high degree of stability and predictability in the teacher/child relationship and in daily classroom functioning
- include curriculum materials, such as a story about a parent dying or a child living with an alcoholic parent, as appropriate; allow the children to talk about the truth of their lives, even though it may be painful for you to hear
- be authentic; accept the child's feelings; discuss and model ways to cope with the stressor based on your own personal experience
- get help for the child; make appropriate referrals quickly
- maintain your integrity and the integrity of your classroom, especially when toxic or dysfunctional family or child behaviors become evident
- provide a consistently safe, caring, and nurturing classroom environment
- extend yourself in relationship with the child and be available to meet his or her needs for attachment to a caring adult.

Each teacher must find ways to resolve the complicated and often conflicting demands of living with children in schools. It is extremely important that you practice the finest caring for self. Our profession is not easy work, and it is unlikely to get easier in the near future (Weissbourd, 1996). Children will bring their unmet needs, unresolved conflicts, and uncared-for wounds to school each day. To be in a position to respond to such needs is a great privilege as well as a heavy responsibility. Children need teachers who are self-aware, self-assured, and self-reliant. They also need teachers who know their personal strengths and limitations, and who can receive nurturance and renewal from a healthy support system. In summary, a high-quality, well-functioning early childhood professional is empathetic and responsive to the human needs of other people and self. Troubled children from distressed families will perhaps need you most of all.

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# COPING WITH LOSS

A teacher's best resource for helping children deal with loss is open communication with families. If the home support system is weak or part of the problem, teachers can work with staff specialists to seek outside help. Grieving, frightened children have to be encouraged and supported to return to classroom life. This can be accomplished through dialogue, play, and work. The following activities are designed to reduce the fears associated with emotional trauma in the classroom community. Careful observation can help teachers balance children's need to express feelings with their right to privacy.

- Explain carefully and simply the nature of the tragic event being experienced and the emotions involved. For example:
    1) Reassure children that it is natural to feel sad when someone we love moves away, becomes sick or injured, or dies.
    2) Discuss death as a natural part of the life cycle.
    3) Ease children into discussions of their own or classmates' experiences of loss by providing relevant information and responding to their questions, perceptions, and concerns.

- Focus on the grieving child in ways that promote inclusion and acceptance. For example:
    1) "Return" the child to the class by assigning a special task such as feeding the fish or choosing a group activity.
    2) Allow grieving or traumatized children to talk about their feelings but provide other outlets if discussion disturbs classmates. Use art or puppet play for more private expression.
    3) Provide opportunities for the children to commemorate loss through play and work activities, such as making memory gifts, planting a flower or tree, lighting a candle, or creating a mural.

- Emphasize children's power to exert a positive effect on other people's lives and on the larger community. For example:
    1) Conduct class discussions about a classmate's serious illness in the child's absence to focus peer concerns into constructive caring.
    2) Help children create and send letters and drawings to a sick or sad friend or collect food and other donations as gestures of compassion.
    3) Encourage pretend play that allows children to practice the emotional skills of empathy and sympathy (e.g., role-play taking a friend to a hospital or welcoming back to school a peer whose pet has died).
    4) Discuss how children can take action against violence and hatred by choosing not to watch certain TV programs or by selecting toys that are not associated with violence.

(Source: Carnes, J. (Ed). (1997). *Starting Small: Teaching Tolerance in Preschool and Early Grades*, 81-82. Montgomery, AL: Southern Poverty Law Center. Reprinted by Permission.)

# early years are learning years

## Media violence and young children

Because young children cannot distinguish between fantasy and reality, they are especially influenced by what they see on TV. Children under seven are particularly vulnerable to powerful images of violent behavior portrayed in the media. Both parents and caregivers share a responsibility for protecting children from potentially harmful effects of exposure to violence through TV, movies, and videos.

When children watch television, they are physically passive, yet mentally alert. Their minds are ripe for absorbing ideas, information, and values. Television can be a powerful teacher, so adults must make sure the lessons children learn are good ones.

**Three effects of too much TV violence on young children**

1. When children see characters on TV or in movies triumph by using physical force, they begin to see violence as an acceptable way of resolving conflict. As a result, children use physical or verbal abuse toward others on the playground or at school.
2. Children may become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others. Viewing violence encourages children to see other people as "enemies" rather than as individuals with thoughts and feelings like themselves. Children who cannot put themselves in others' shoes may become less desirable play-mates.
3. Children may become more fearful of the world around them. Children's natural anxieties may become magnified by watching TV and movies in which the world is a dangerous place where violence triumphs over peace.

There are other, more subtle effects of viewing too much violence on TV:

- **Children who view too much media violence may have more difficulty getting along with others.** If children do not see acts of kindness between other children and adults, they are less likely to be kind, or resolve their conflicts peacefully. This makes other children less eager to play with them.
- **Violent TV programs do not teach good language skills.** Young children tend to repeat things they hear as they begin to develop their own vocabularies. Violent movies and TV programs show children a very limited way to talk about their problems—and to solve them.
- **Viewing TV violence limits children's imaginations.** Make-believe play helps children learn about themselves and the world around them. Yet, many toys marketed today are associated with violent programs or movies. Children tend to act out scenes they have already viewed with the very same characters. If toys only encourage children to imitate scenes of violence, what kind of benefits are they getting from play?

### How parents can help

1. Plan your family viewing. Give children a choice of what to watch—within certain guidelines.
2. Move the TV to a room that is not at the center of family life. Limit children's viewing to one or two hours a day.
3. Offer children other options. Play games, read books, or give children other opportunities to be active and creative.
4. Watch TV with your child, and talk about the programs you view together. Point out when you disapprove of a character's violent acts and when you think there are better ways to resolve problems.
5. Discuss commercials with your children. Point out when advertisers make false or exaggerated claims.
6. Support regulation of children's television. Encourage legislators to support legislation that promotes educational, nonviolent TV programming.
7. Call or write TV stations (network and cable) to express your opinions—not only when you are offended, but when you are pleased.

For more information:
Coalition for Quality Children's Video, 535 Cordova Rd., Suite 456, Santa Fe, NM 87501. 505-989-8076.
National Foundation to Improve Televsion, 60 State St., Suite 3400, Boston, MA 02109. 617-523-6553.

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**naeyc** NATIONAL ASSOCIATION for the EDUCATION of YOUNG CHILDREN, 1509 16th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036-1426
202-232-8777, 800-424-2460, FAX: 202-328-1846

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# FAMILIES MATTER: BEGIN WITH THE BASICS

Aim to keep in touch with families instead of waiting until problems arise

Build a classroom web site for families to "visit"

Create a "How Families Can Help" handout with practical suggestions for home activities

Develop a parent library with books, videos, and other materials to help parents guide their learning

Establish a daily homework hotline for parents to call

Find times for parents to contact you beyond the school day

Give families clear information on school policies, programs and goals

Hold conferences at the workplace or a neighborhood site convenient to parents

Include parents in school committees and other decision-making groups

Join with other grade-level teachers to host a brunch for parents

Keep classroom newsletters going home on a regular basis

Listen respectfully to the families of your students

Make home visits

Notice the good things your students are doing and share these frequently with their families

Offer workshops on parenting children and teens

Provide opportunities for parents to share their skills and to learn new ones

Quell distrust by being culturally sensitive

Remember that all families want the very best for their children

Survey parents to learn about their ideas, concerns, observations, and opinions

Take advantage of any training on building family-school partnerships

Use parent volunteers to help in the classroom, make learning games, or recruit other parents

Videotape classroom activities or field trips that families can view at home

Welcome families to your school with banners, posters, and smiles

Xerox copies of articles to share with parents

Yak with other teachers about good involvement methods they have used

Zero in on jargon - include a glossary of terms in newsletters or handbooks (and avoid it whenever possible).

(Source: Indiana Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships, 1998. Reprinted by permission.)

# V. Partnerships with Families
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# ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

> *"When I found myself, in 1974, the selected school leader, I wanted to deliberately reshape that role and ensure that whoever held it would retain the mind-set of a teacher. . . I had a hard time realizing that if the staff's job was not to be technicians carrying out my ideas but collaborators engaged in shared challenge, then my dreams could not always take center stage."*
>
> Deborah Meier
> *The Power of Their Ideas*

# ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

In this chapter, administrators throughout the state of Indiana share their thoughts about early childhood education. You will find articles from administrators, higher education sources, and professional journals. The chapter contains the following sections:

## I. Role of the Principal

- ☐ Introduction
- ☐ *A Principal's Perspective* by Trish Weis
- ☐ What to Look for in Developmentally Appropriate Classrooms edited by Sue Bredekamp
- ☐ Hallway Walk

## II. Role of Central Office Administrators and School Board Members

- ☐ *A Curriculum Coordinator's Perspective* by Jean Church
- ☐ *A Superintendent's Perspective* by Tim Hyland
- ☐ *A School Board Member's Perspective* by Marlane Tisdale
- ☐ *The Administrator's Role in Professional Development* by the Indiana Education Policy Center

## III. Role of Teacher Educators

- ☐ *Lessons I've Learned* by Ena Shelley
- ☐ *In the Best Interest of Children: Listening to and Supporting Their Teachers* by Jacqueline Blackwell
- ☐ *Professional Preparation in Colleges and Universities* by Barbara T. Bowman

## IV. Role of the Administrative Staff References and Resources

# I. Role of the Principal

Current research on the brain and the way children learn is having a great impact on early childhood education (New Frontiers for Research, Policy and Practice, 1996). These findings have implications regarding the role administrators play in the success of the school. "Administrators of early childhood programs (should) have appropriate professional qualifications, including training specific to the education and development of young children, and . . . provide teachers time and opportunities to work collaboratively with colleagues and parents" (Bredekamp, 1997, p. 24). Principals must model the attitudes the rest of the staff should adopt and learn new concepts along with everyone else (Zemelman, et.al., 1993).

"A strategic approach to leadership involves forethought and planning, awareness of how actions within a social system are related and affect one another, and purposeful coordination of resources" (Hallinger and McCary, 1992. p. 300). Administrators are responsible for the acquisition of funding and resources needed to implement practices that are developmentally appropriate. Principals need to support staff morale and motivation, shared decision making, ongoing professional development, and evaluation that encourages teachers to set personal and organizational objectives. "Effective administrators and school board members recognize teachers as learners and support their professional right to try to improve the status of . . . instruction" (Zemelman, et.al., 1993. p.30).

Administrators can help make changes to better meet the needs of young children. Changes need to be carefully planned and based on research and theory about what is appropriate for young children. If supported by a commitment from all stakeholders, time for planning, professional development, and problem-solving, schools can ensure that curricula and programs are responsive to children's developmental needs and to that of their families.

In this section of the guide, administrators throughout the state of Indiana share their thoughts and perceptions of early childhood education, and its importance in the lives of our young children and their families. Each one of these leaders brings their particular expertise to the educational arena, as they examine what is best for preschool through third grade children in Indiana schools.

## BRAIN DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH— WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

1. How humans develop and learn depends critically and continually on the interplay between an individual's genetic endowment and the nutrition, surroundings, care, stimulation, and teaching that are provided or withheld.
2. Early care has decisive and long-lasting effects on how people develop and learn, how they cope with stress, and how they regulate their own emotions. A strong, secure attachment to a nurturing adult can have a protective biological function, helping a growing child withstand the ordinary stress of daily life.
3. In the first decade of life, the brain's ability to change and compensate is especially remarkable. These are optimal periods of opportunity—"prime times" during which the brain is particularly efficient at specific types of learning.
4. The brain's plasticity also means that there are times when negative experiences or the absence of appropriate stimulation are more likely to have serious and sustained effects.
5. Evidence amassed by neuroscientists and child development experts over the last decade point to the wisdom and efficacy of well designed programs created to promote healthy cognitive, emotional, and social development—and the quality of life—of many children.

(Source: *Rethinking the Brain-New Insights into Early Development*; Conference Report-Brain Development in Young Children: New Frontiers for Research, Policy and Practice, 1996, Washington, DC: NAEYC. Reprinted by permission)

# A PRINCIPAL'S PERSPECTIVE

*Trish Weis*

*Brentwood Early Childhood Education Center, Anderson*

Brentwood Early Childhood Education Center is a centralized preschool and kindergarten center in the Anderson Community School Corporation serving nearly 300 three through six-year-old children and their families. More than 75 percent of Brentwood students qualify for free and reduced lunch, which is 42 percent above the local average and 52 percent above the state average. The majority of children attending Brentwood come from low-income, single parent homes. For many children this is the first socialized experience they have had. Many have not benefited from preschool programs, playgroups, or other kinds of organized experiences.

The children, families, and staff comprising the school community face many challenges. We have many children who have experienced a tremendous amount of instability in the first years of their lives. They are dealing with issues of poverty and issues that surround poverty. We find ourselves needing to provide lots of good, solid, nurturing experiences from the very beginning to build a foundation, so these kids can be successful and feel confident and capable in their abilities as learners.

I strive to provide leadership in supporting children and families in ways that are developmentally appropriate. Many such efforts were in place when I began as principal in the fall of 1996; others were initiated by the staff since that time. A full-day kindergarten was established for a neighborhood school population deemed at-risk. Lunch and two-way transportation are provided for all children, and breakfast is available, as well. There is an extended-day kindergarten funded through Title I. Children in this program are identified as needing additional support; they are in a regular half-day kindergarten and receive enriched experiences the other half of the day in a small group with a teacher and an assistant.

Our kindergarten children who qualify for special education services also receive a full-day program. They spend half of the day in a regular classroom and the other half in a small group with a special education teacher and an assistant. Our school also houses the special needs preschool program for all of the Anderson Community School Corporation. Children typically enter the program on their third birthday and are often with us for three years. The continuity of the same teaching team throughout the preschool experience has made a tremendous difference in the growth and development of these children.

As principal, one of my primary tasks is building relationships with and among families, staff, and children. I try to be with children in the classroom on a regular basis. One strategy I used, in my first year, was to give each teacher an hour of release time for professional reading or observation in another classroom. I went to their classroom with my own plans and facilitated various learning experiences during these one-hour sessions.

Another way I have contact with each child is through the "Birthday Basket." Each child comes to my office on his or her birthday and browses through a basket of books. The child then selects the book of his or her choice, and I write a birthday message in it. It has been an incredible experience to see the faces of children for whom this is the first book of their own.

I spend a great deal of time working with individual children. We have a variety of concerns and problems that are manifested in children's behavior. One of our commitments is to look at those behaviors and identify the source so we can get the appropriate support services and help to the family. Much of my time is spent trying to get to know children, so I can find ways to meet their needs.

We strive to find nonthreatening ways to bring families into the school. An open house, featuring slides of the children at the beginning of their kindergarten journey, kicks things off in the fall. This is followed by a fall harvest evening with the dual purpose of providing a safe alternative to trick-or-treating and getting people in the building without playing the professional/parent roles. This has been a huge success.

The school has also established the Family Resource Center (FRC). We received a grant with which we purchased a variety of toys, games, books, art supplies, and manipulatives to create a lending library. We encourage families to use the materials that will support identified needs and interests of the children. Last year, parent sessions on early literacy development, health and nutrition, and behavior and management issues were hosted through Title I, with the teacher calling each home with a personal invitation. This year we held Family Math Night and Family Literacy Night with activities designed to engage children and adults in fun and educational ways.

Other family contacts include home visits, welcoming phone calls, orientation sessions at the beginning of the year, phone calls to children when they learn their telephone numbers, and letters to the children when they learn their addresses. We use the citywide *Homework Hotline* to record stories so children and their families can call and hear a book. Other announcements, parenting information, and community resources are also shared through this technology. We conduct family conferences twice a year and are beginning to include the children in those conferences.

One of my priorities is facilitating the professional growth of the staff. We devote half of each staff meeting to professional reading or conversation and engage regularly in reflection on and examination of our beliefs, assumptions, and practices. We continue to try to raise our own awareness of the stress and complexities embedded in the lives of many of our students. New partnerships with social service providers, networks, and university staff who have expertise in the areas of crisis, stress, and changing family dynamics, provide us with a knowledge base and a collaborative approach to supporting our families.

This school has made a commitment to developmentally appropriate practice. We feel it is important for all kids. For our children, who may have had limited quality experiences socially, academically, and physically in the first few years of life, we feel it is even more imperative. We begin with what we know about child development and build experiences that are appropriate for the age group in general and appropriate for the individual child based on relevant, active hands-on engagement.

The challenge of meeting the growing needs of children and families in developmentally appropriate ways requires thoughtful work for all schools. At Brentwood, there is a story of celebration and one of heartache nearly every day. It is imperative that we enter into meaningful relationships with staff, children, and families. This is a critical role in school leadership and redefines the role of the principal in many ways.

> *"One of my early mentors said, 'Don't take the credit for anything. Give all the credit to your staff.' That advice has served me well. Since there will continue to be many instances when my 'creative juices' have temporarily quit flowing, it is reassuring to know that I have surrounded myself with creative people. Good leaders create a culture where empowered individuals solve problems together."*
>
> Jeanie Cash
>
> (NAESP - 1997 - National Distinguished Principal for California)

# WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE CLASSROOMS

## Curriculum

- Curriculum is designed to develop children's knowledge and skills in all developmental areas—physical, social, emotional, and intellectual—and to help children learn how to learn.
- Curriculum and instruction are designed to develop children's self-esteem, sense of competence, and positive feelings toward learning.
- Each child is viewed as a unique person with an individual pattern and timing of growth. Curriculum and instruction are responsive to individual differences in ability and interests.
- Different levels of ability, development, and learning styles are expected, accepted, and used to design curriculum. Children are allowed to move at their own pace in acquiring important skills.

## Teaching Strategies

- The curriculum is integrated so that children's learning in all traditional subject areas occurs primarily through projects and learning centers that teachers plan and that reflect children's interests and suggestions.
- Teachers guide children's involvement in projects and enrich the learning experience by extending children's ideas, responding to their questions, engaging them in conversation, and challenging their thinking.
- Teachers use much of their planning time to prepare the environment so children can learn through active involvement with each other, with adults and older children serving as informal tutors, and with materials. Many learning centers are available for children to choose from.
- Teachers encourage children to evaluate their own work and to determine where improvement is needed. Errors are viewed as a natural and necessary part of learning. Teachers analyze children's errors and use the information obtained to plan curriculum and instruction.
- Individual children or small groups are expected to work and play cooperatively or alone in learning centers and on projects. Activity centers are changed frequently so children have new things to do. Frequent outings and visits from resource people are planned.
- Learning materials and activities are concrete, real, and relevant to children's lives. Objects children can manipulate and experiment with are readily accessible. Tables are used for children to work alone or in small groups.

## Evaluation

- No letter or numerical grades are given during the primary years. Grades are considered inadequate reflections of children's ongoing learning.
- Each child's progress is assessed primarily through observation and recording at regular intervals. Results are used to improve and individualize instruction.
- Children's progress is reported to parents in the form of narrative comments following an outline of topics. A child's progress is reported in comparison to his or her own previous performance, and parents are given general information about how the child compares to standardized national averages.
- Children are not "promoted" nor do they "fail." Retention is avoided because of its serious impact on children's self-esteem and the fact that the practice disproportionately affects male, minority, very young, and low-income children.

(Source: *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8*, edited by Sue Bredekamp. Washington, DC: NAEYC, 1987. Reprinted by permission.)

# HALLWAY WALK

## When you walk into a classroom, what do you see?

(See the next page for information on how to code.)

__ 1. Curriculum areas integrated through projects and learning centers

__ 2. Teachers and students working together to develop projects and activities that build upon the children's current interests

__ 3. Children spending large amounts of time working cooperatively in small heterogeneous groups

__ 4. Materials limited mainly to textbooks, workbooks, and pencils

__ 5. Each child's progress being assessed primarily through observation and evaluation of work samples

__ 6. The child's day fragmented into multiple subjects or unconnected activities

__ 7. Children working quietly and alone doing worksheets and other rote exercises

__ 8. Children engaged in making choices at open-ended center areas

__ 9. Teacher-made bulletin boards with perfect papers displayed

__ 10. Students silently reading books of their own choosing

__ 11. Students in permanent reading groups based on their reading levels

__ 12. Teachers grading papers during sustained silent reading time

__ 13. Students reading stories in the basal textbook in sequential order

__ 14. Students being encouraged to read books of different authors, cultures, and genres

__ 15. Sentences being dictated for the students to write correctly

__ 16. Students actively involved in the writing process (researching, drafting, peer conferencing, editing, publishing, etc.)

__ 17. Teachers frequently asking questions requiring a one-word or short answer response

__ 18. Teachers working and collaborating together

__ 19. Children with special needs integrated into all classroom activities

__ 20. The room organized from the children's perspective to allow ease of movement and access to learning tools, materials, and centers

__ 21. Bulletin boards that are designed and utilized by the students

__ 22. Teachers lecturing to the whole group with very little conversation or discussion

__ 23. Special needs children spending time out of the classroom or in segregated groups within the classroom

__ 24. A variety of materials and activities that are concrete and relevant to the children's lives

__ 25. Teachers using a variety of active, intellectually engaging strategies, including posing problems or discrepancies, asking thought-provoking questions, adding complexity to tasks, and engaging in discussion

__ 26. Children actively engaged with art, music, and movement

__ 27. Children's progress reported only in letter or numerical grades

__ 28. Teachers teaching each letter of the alphabet one week at a time

__ 29. The teaching of phonics and vocabulary through the use of meaningful text

__ 30. Teachers modeling reading strategies such as the use of context clues and rereading

# HALLWAY WALK

## More effective and less effective instructional practices.

**M = More effective practice L = Less effective practice**

M 1. Curriculum areas integrated through projects and learning centers
M 2. Teachers and students working together to develop projects and activities that build upon the children's current interests
M 3. Children spending large amounts of time working cooperatively in small heterogeneous groups
L 4. Materials limited mainly to textbooks, workbooks, and pencils
M 5. Each child's progress being assessed primarily through observation and evaluation of work samples
L 6. The child's day fragmented into multiple subjects or unconnected activities
L 7. Children working quietly and alone doing worksheets and other rote exercises
M 8. Children engaged in making choices at open-ended center areas
L 9. Teacher-made bulletin boards with perfect papers displayed
M 10. Students silently reading books of their own choosing
L 11. Students in permanent reading groups based on their reading levels
L 12. Teachers grading papers during sustained silent reading time
L 13. Students reading stories in the basal textbook in sequential order
M 14. Students being encouraged to read books of different authors, cultures, and genres
L 15. Sentences being dictated for the students to write correctly
M 16. Students actively involved in the writing process (researching, drafting, peer conferencing, editing, publishing, etc.)
L 17. Teachers frequently asking questions requiring a one-word or short answer response
M 18. Teachers working and collaborating together
M 19. Children with special needs integrated into all classroom activities
M 20. The room organized from the children's perspective to allow ease of movement and access to learning tools, materials, and centers
M 21. Bulletin boards that are designed and utilized by the students
L 22. Teachers lecturing to the whole group with very little conversation or discussion
L 23. Special needs children spending time out of the classroom or in segregated groups within the classroom
M 24. A variety of materials and activities that are concrete and relevant to the children's lives
M 25. Teachers using a variety of active, intellectually engaging strategies, including posing problems or discrepancies, asking thought-provoking questions, adding complexity to tasks, and engaging in discussion
M 26. Children actively engaged with art, music, and movement
L 27. Children's progress reported only in letter or numerical grades
L 28. Teachers teaching each letter of the alphabet one week at a time
M 29. The teaching of phonics and vocabulary through the use of meaningful text
M 30. Teachers modeling reading strategies for students such as the use of context clues and rereading

# II. Role of Central Office Administrators and School Board Members

## A PERSPECTIVE FROM A CURRICULUM COORDINATOR

*Dr. Jean Church*
*Curriculum Coordinator*
*Vigo County Community School Corporation, Terre Haute*

More than a hundred years ago, William Channing wrote:

> "The great end in education is not to stamp our minds upon our students, but to stir up their own; not to make them see with our eyes, but to look steadily and inquiringly with their own; not so much to give them definite knowledge as to inspire in them a fervent love of truth; not to force upon them an outward regularity, but to release in them inward springs of inquiry; not to bind them to fixed notions of ours, but to prepare them to judge impartially whatever subjects may be offered for their decision."

Although written long ago, the goal of education for today's children is the same. As a district level curriculum coordinator, I certainly know that curriculum guides and textbook/instructional materials adoptions must take place. However, the real work is in supporting learning for teachers. The authentic work of curriculum people constitutes helping teachers develop deeply embedded curiosity about how children think and how they come to know; enabling teachers to expand their horizons, to realize there is always something more to find out; and helping them to conclude that their job is not to perfect each child each year, but to open doors and extend possibilities.

District and building administrators help teachers grow professionally by valuing learning for themselves and for the teachers, enabling teacher autonomy, promoting teacher self-assessment and evaluation, and encouraging teachers and not teachers' manuals to be in charge of instructional decisions. Much of what we know about the way children learn also applies to teachers and administrators. Kathy Richardson writes that the learning environment we aim for with children is one that:

- encourages thoughtfulness
- engages children's thinking
- stimulates search for meaning
- encourages children to look for connections and relationships

This same kind of learning environment, which enables teachers and administrators to reach new levels of competence, must be carefully and thoughtfully crafted.

Just as the work of learning goes on inside the heads of children, the work of teachers occurs primarily inside their heads with the knowledge and experiences they have. That is why it is so vitally important for districts to support time and space for opportunities for study, reflection, and discussion. At the building level or across the district, ongoing classes, study groups, emphasis on professional reading, and systematic staff development are just some of the ways districts can engage teachers in becoming more thoughtful practitioners. The social nature of learning cannot be ignored when we plan for children's learning, and it cannot be ignored when it comes to teacher growth. It is important for teachers to be with other people who love teaching and the intellectual stimulation of talking about their craft and trade.

The following anecdote illustrates the importance of supporting learning for teachers. During this past school year, we utilized our ISTEP-UP money to design a class specifically for first and second grade teachers from the eligible elementary schools. The focus of our work and study was to learn how to work more effectively with struggling students in the areas of language arts and mathematics. (Of course, it spilled over into effective teaching across the curriculum.) We used our grant money for teacher stipends, professional resources, and student materials. Through collaboration with Indiana State University, we were able to offer college credit. We met every Tuesday evening after school from January through May. At the end of the semester, the task for our final reflection was to examine our instructional practices in light of Brian Cambourne's conditions for learning (which we had studied), and then determine which practices we would continue and which we would change.

On the evening the papers were to be completed, Tracy, a first grade teacher, told us that during the week she had encountered her first serious family/school conflict. A grandmother of one of the students was upset and stated that she believed the teacher and school had not done a good job of educating her grandchild. Tracy shared with the group that she felt if it had not been for the class and what she was learning, she would not have gotten through this conflict in the way in which it was resolved.

During the class, the two things which gave Tracy the most support were: 1) emphasis was placed on using assessment to inform instruction and children to inform the curriculum, and 2) emphasis was placed on thinking analytically about teaching practices. She told the class that writing the final reflection helped her define and articulate why she was doing what she was doing and how that contributed to the growth of her students.

During the meeting with the principal, the grandmother, and the child's mother, Tracy was able to not only share the child's folder but was confident in her ability to interpret what this meant in terms of appropriate instruction and what goes on in the classroom. All of this made good sense to the mother of the child. The end result was that the mother was pleased, the child continued to progress, and the grandmother did not ask for any more conferences.

On-going professional development provides teachers and administrators with some of the tools and support needed to engage in meaningful problem solving for themselves and serve the children of Indiana well into the 21st century.

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# A SUPERINTENDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

*Dr. Timothy F. Hyland*
*MSD Lawrence Township, Indianapolis*

If there is one lesson that I have learned well in my thirty-plus years as an educator, it is that the most critical time for a child's education is the early years. That may sound strange coming from someone who, before becoming a superintendent thirteen years ago, spent the majority of his career in the secondary arena—as a social studies teacher, high school principal, and assistant superintendent for secondary instruction.

But, it was exactly my experience with high school students, especially those not succeeding in school, that so convinced me of the critical need for students to get off to a successful start in the early years. I witnessed, firsthand, how the effects of a poor educational start accumulate over the years for students.

The research of David Weikart, Lilian Katz and others bears this out. If we want all children, including those at-risk, to succeed in school, we must provide quality early-childhood education. Not only does this require a philosophical commitment but a financial one. I believe that "front-loading" our resources will pay off big time in the long run, with happier and more successful students who require less remediation at a later time.

I am particularly proud of two early childhood initiatives undertaken by the Champaign, Illinois public schools during my eleven-year tenure there as superintendent: (1) the development of our "Get Ready" pre-school program that provided a half-day, hands-on, experiential program for three- and four-year-olds who were a developmental step or two behind and (2) the introduction of *Reading Recovery* in the early grades (something which Purdue University studied and brought to Indiana).

In Lawrence Township, there has been a long-standing commitment to quality early childhood education through the Centralized Kindergarten program. This program has earned a state and national reputation for excellence. As Superintendent of the MSD of Lawrence Township, I am committed to nurturing this tradition and building upon this strong tradition.

> ***"If we want all children, including those at-risk, to succeed in school, we must provide quality early-childhood education."***

Our kindergarten program is based upon four guiding principles: (1) a nurturing environment that respects the dignity of each child and the value of play, (2) a growing, caring staff that is involved in purposeful staff development with one another, (3) an appropriate curriculum that engages young minds in active learning, and (4) strong family partnerships in which the family and school work together for the child's benefit.

This year, we have begun to offer an extended-day kindergarten option which allows children to spend an additional half-day engaged in meaningful instruction with specially trained staff. We are making more early education plans for the future. The lesson that early education is critical is one that we will continue to teach and learn in Lawrence Township.

# A SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER'S PERSPECTIVE

*Marlane Tisdale*
*MSD Warren Township, Indianapolis*

All school board members throughout Indiana have a tremendous responsibility to their school districts, to the children, and the parents that they serve. Before making decisions, they must ask themselves this important question, "Is this decision what is best for our children?"

In Indiana, seven percent of the school board members have been educators. The remaining 93 percent bring perspectives from other facets of Indiana communities. How do school boards KNOW what is best for the children?

Members must constantly keep abreast of all aspects of education, and how they affect children. They must become knowledgeable by reading and keeping current on recent research, attending conferences, speaking with experts, and listening to the professionals in their district. Only by doing so, will they know what is best for the children. School board members should be held accountable for their actions and their decisions concerning children and their families.

As board of education members, we must look at all aspects of the education of the children in our districts from preschool through high school. It is our charge to provide the children in our districts every opportunity to develop their abilities to their fullest potential and to prepare them to be lifelong learners who are happy, productive members of society.

The years birth to age eight are "the crucial years of education when children gain the essential skills, knowledge, and dispositions critical to later school success" (Schultz & Lombardi, 1989: p. 7). Research has proven it is vital that we address these early years by providing our children with developmentally appropriate programs (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Howes, 1988; Katz, 1989; Kostelnik, 1993; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1993). These programs need to provide learning that will be relevant and meaningful to the children, develop skills in problem solving, and develop critical and logical thinking skills which are so necessary in preparing our children for the future.

School board members have the potential to make positive, monumental changes for children and impact their educational successes. This change begins with developmentally appropriate programs for children of all ages. We cannot afford to wait any longer to implement best practices for children if we are serious about having high quality, effective schools throughout Indiana, and preparing our children for the future.

> *"School board members have the potential to make positive, monumental changes for children and impact their educational successes. This change begins with developmentally appropriate programs for children of all ages."*

# THE ADMINISTRATOR'S ROLE IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

(Excerpt from *Learning Together: Professional Development for Better Schools*.
Developed and published by the Indiana Education Policy Center for the
Indiana Department of Education, 1996, p. 30-31. Reprinted by permission.)

Without the proper setting and support, even the best professional development initiatives undertaken by the brightest and most motivated school professionals are in danger of withering on the vine. On the other hand, in a school where the principal is a strong advocate of continuous learning, where district policies and resources support school improvement efforts, and where time is built into the schedule, the odds are much better that teachers will participate in and profit from professional development, to the ultimate benefit of the students.

## LEADERSHIP

Capable, active leadership is vital to the success of professional development projects—or of any school improvement projects, for that matter. On the other hand, indifference (or worse, outright hostility) on the part of leaders makes it difficult for professional development initiatives to get under way, much less to be sustained during the first trying months of implementation or to be institutionalized after the initial enthusiasm fades away.

What does it mean for leaders—particularly principals, but also school board members, superintendents, and teachers in leadership positions—to support professional development? The most important characteristics of top-notch leadership are:

- **Advocacy:** Good leaders place a high priority on continuous professional growth. According to a 1991 article, *Enabling professional development: What have we learned?*, by Milbrey McLaughlin, co-director of the Center for Research on the Context of Teaching at Stanford University, leaders are responsible "for establishing the norms, values, and expectations essential to consequential professional development. . . . One way leaders accomplish this is by establishing professional growth and problem solving as a priority for the school, and by making it 'safe' for teachers to critically examine their practice and take risks."

- **Participation:** Principals who participate in professional development activities alongside teachers lead by example and help break down hierarchies that may inhibit communication.

- **Assistance:** Good leaders try to remove administrative obstacles to professional development and seek resources for teachers in the form of money, materials, and—especially—time.

- **Problem Solving:** As Joyce, Wolf, and Calhoun, (*The Self-Renewing School*, 1993), put it, "The most effective leaders do not simply follow established formulas for getting things done, but are effective diagnosticians, problem solvers, and leaders of others to find needs and create solutions."

- **Pressure:** Good leaders do not operate exclusively in the realm of sweetness and light but may have occasion to apply a little pressure to move complacent teachers forward. A teacher quoted approvingly by Judith Warren Little describes it as follows: "I'm not enough of a dreamer to think you're going to get a whole faculty behind something without a little coercion, a little polite coercion. And if you don't do that you don't ever have any growth in your faculty."

- **Collegiality:** "Administrators exercise strong leadership by promoting a 'norm of collegiality,'" write Dennis Sparks and Susan Loucks-Horsley, "minimizing status differences between themselves and their staff members, promoting informal communication, and reducing their own need to use formal controls to achieve coordination." This does not mean they do not exercise power when necessary, but that they respect the expertise of teachers, seek consensus when possible, discuss teaching and learning alternatives with teachers, and establish planning committees and other formal structures for promoting teacher communication and input.

## PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The following five principles encourage teachers and administrators at each school site to plan and implement professional development activities based on a coherent vision for overall school improvement:

- Effective professional development is school based.
- Effective professional development uses coaching and other follow-up procedures.
- Effective professional development is collaborative.
- Effective professional development is embedded in the daily lives of teachers, providing for continuous growth.
- Effective professional development focuses on student learning and is evaluated, at least in part, on that basis.

(Bull & Buechler, 1996, p. 4)

# LESSONS I'VE LEARNED

*Dr. Ena Shelley*
*College of Education*
*Butler University, Indianapolis*

(Excerpt from Dr. Shelley's keynote address at the 1999 Kindergarten Conference in Indianapolis, IN. Reprinted by permission.)

I selected the title, "Lessons I've Learned," because I would like for all of us to focus upon what we have learned this year. So often, we talk about what we have taught, but we don't always focus upon what we have learned. Reflection is part of the teaching/learning process. To grow as a teacher, we each must ask ourselves questions such as:

- What did I learn from this child?
- What in the environment aided the learning of the children?
- What in the environment hindered their learning?
- Why was this strategy or topic effective?

Today, I am going to share some personal lessons I have learned this year. Perhaps my examples will spark your desire to reflect about what you have learned, not just what you have taught. I will begin with examples of lessons I learned from children.

### Lessons From Children

**The first lesson** was taught to me by a dear first grade child, Steven. You know who Steven is in a matter of a few minutes in the classroom because you hear: "Steven, is that the best choice to make?" "Steven, where are you to be right now?" I was visiting Steven's classroom to observe one of my practicum students. I had been there the previous week, and Steven's name and face were still fresh on my mind.

I sat down next to him and said, "Hello, Steven." Steven looked at me and asked, "How did you know my name?" I replied, "Well, I was here last week to visit Miss Haley, and I remembered your name and nice smile." Steven smiled. Then, just making conversation, I asked, "Are you having a good day Steven?" Without missing a beat, he looked up at me, smiled and said, "I sure am . . . I haven't wet my pants all day!"

**Lesson Learned**: A great reminder that when you ask an honest question, expect an honest answer! Believe me, every time someone passes me and says, "Hello. How are you?" I chuckle.

I learned **the second lesson** this year while watching a group of five-year-old children at LaVilleta School in Reggio Emilia, Italy. The children spent a long time totally engaged in completing maps of how ants traveled on their playground. They were constructing clay structures to build a village for the ants. This was one of many examples I saw of what Lilian Katz describes as being totally absorbed and engaged.

**Lesson Learned**: Children have pure joy and fascination with the "real thing"; how much richer the experience I just described is as compared to watching a video. The things we take for granted, such as ants, are no longer new to us, and we can miss great opportunities if we don't stop, look, listen, and wonder with children.

**The third lesson-** I had just entered a school to observe one of my students, and the fire alarm went off. I quietly followed a group of first graders outside. When we got to the designated stopping place, this little boy looked at me and said, "Hey lady, you did a really good job, and you weren't even here when we practiced!!"

**Lesson Learned**: Never take for granted that we all know the same thing!

### Lessons from Pre-Service Teachers

Now I want to move to some reflections of lessons my college students taught me this year. **My first lesson**–We were having a class discussion about Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, and were focused on the bodily kinesthetic learner. We were talking about what it must have been like to be Michael Jordan's teacher or Robin William's teacher. They probably weren't sitting quietly! Then, we went on to have a discussion about why some children need to have their knees in their chairs, tap their pencils, etc. I caught the eye of my dear student, Kathie, whose eyes were filled with tears. She shared with the class that it wasn't until the present that she realized the type of learner she was and how the majority of her teachers had not understood.

**Lesson Learned**: I am reminded of how, if we as teachers do not meet the needs of children, we give them heavy luggage packed full of hurt to carry throughout life.

**The second lesson** came when I tried to apply a powerful thought I learned in Reggio. The quote is from Carlina Rinaldi, "Put away the map, and find the compass." I did not have the typical course syllabus to which students are accustomed. We spent time getting in touch with being children again. One day, when the stress level was getting high for my students, I gave them this assignment: go outside and paint with water or blow bubbles. Lay down on the grass, and look up at the sky. I think they thought I was really losing it at first!

We also spent a great deal of time reading and making meaning of an article by Loris Malaguzzi entitled, "Your Image of the Child: Where Teaching Begins." We talked about our individual images of children, where our beliefs about children came from, and how beliefs change. The Reggio focus is on developing the potential of each child. This is an excerpt from the journal of one of my students:

> *Today, Mrs. W. began my observation time with telling me about Nick. According to Mrs. W., Nick should not be in this classroom. She told me all the things he can't do: He can't read well, he doesn't know the letter "n" which is in his name, he doesn't get along well with the other children- and so on and so on...*
>
> *As I listened to Mrs. W., I began to wonder what her "image of a child" is. It appears to be the "deficit model" we talked about in class. I have worked individually with Nick and where I see great potential, Mrs. W. seems to focus on the negative. She doesn't seem to see what there is to build upon; Nick knows so much about airplanes and jets. Does Mrs. W. even know this about him?*
>
> *Malaguzzi described the potential of all children and the role teachers have to capitalize on it. Mrs. W. is missing Nick's potential, but I will try my best to build upon his many talents when I'm with him. Maybe I can subtly help Mrs. W. see them, too.*
>
> *A nagging question–I wonder if Mrs. W. at one time held an "image of children" as those with great potential but has some how lost this focus over the years. If so, what happened to change her "image?"*

I would ask each of you to reflect about your image of the child. I can share with you that I totally believed in the potential and ability of my students, and they exceeded my expectations. As Lady Bird Johnson once wrote, "Children are likely to live up to what you believe of them."

**Lesson Learned:** Find your compass and you will go on the best journeys!!

### Lessons from Teachers

And now, I would like to shift to the powerful lessons I learned this year from teachers. **The first lesson** is a note that Susie Sherman shared with me. Susie is a wonderful kindergarten teacher at Lawrence

Centralized Kindergarten. They have high school cadet students who come into the classrooms to participate. This is a note from a high school cadet teacher to Mrs. Sherman:

> Dear Mrs. Sherman,
>
> I just wanted to write you a little thank you note for letting me job shadow. I had a fun time watching all the activities you did with the children. It was a good experience for me. I have always thought about being a kindergarten teacher and, thanks to the experience of actually witnessing it, I have decided to change my mind. I will choose one of my other choices I have considered.
>
> Thank you very much,
> Nicole

**Lesson Learned**: Teaching kindergarten isn't for everyone!

**And my last**, but certainly not least, reflection of the day. I was observing a phenomenal teacher at Sunnyside, Carol Percy, who also had one of my Butler students. Carol was modeling every effective positive guidance technique—the "feeling tone" was so powerfully positive. She made this hard work look effortless. Later that day, I had the good fortune to share my observations with Carol. She smiled at me and said,

"You know, Ena, I love to sing. And I've taught long enough that I've sung at the weddings of former students and, sadly, I've sung at some of their funerals. When I get discouraged, I look at their arms. Those little arms reaching up to me. It reminds me of when my children were born, and I saw those little tiny arms reaching up to me. I must reach every little hand and arm that is reaching out and hold it and guide it to the best of my ability."

**Lesson Learned**: We must all open our hearts and our hands to each child and to one another, and remember with great reverence the power you each hold as a teacher!

# IN THE BEST INTEREST OF CHILDREN:
## Listening To And Supporting Their Teachers

*Dr. Jacqueline Blackwell*
*IUPUI, Indianapolis*

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Through the years, many educators have heard the words: "Whatever we do must be done in the best interests of children; we must demonstrate the best practices." Although we all understand these words, there is something missing that needs our consideration. We need to both offer, and give, special attention to the teachers of young children. Special attention means finding ways to listen to and support these teachers so that they are free to explore, take risks, accept new opportunities or challenges, reinvent themselves, and experience success as they develop curricula and plan programs for young children.

As we offer and give this attention to teachers of young children, we must acknowledge the difference between offering and giving attention. Offering attention may set the stage for what can, and could, happen. It opens windows of possibilities to traveled, and less traveled, pathways and charted, or uncharted, courses. On the other hand, giving attention may send the message that such deliveries, whether scheduled or unscheduled, will require no additional follow-up because each transaction is complete in itself.

Offering attention requires a different, or changing, mindset by those individuals who either supervise, mentor or assist these teachers of young children. The goals should be to provide for the children's best interests, and to demonstrate an array of best practices. Individuals in appointed, and self-appointed, positions must be willing to pay attention to the spoken, and unspoken, needs of teachers while balancing the varied needs of the students. A commitment to help these teachers must be a top priority. They must see a clean slate that allows them to identify their needs as they work with young children and their families, as well as colleagues, administrators, volunteers and the community at large. We are ever mindful that we must focus on what is "in the best interest of young children."

Supporting teachers of young children requires a multi-faceted plan, which sets the stage for creating a layered environment that nurtures the minds, spirits, bodies and hearts of teachers. This environment reinforces these messages:

1. Erase from the rule book the need to receive permission before engaging in creative activities.

2. Celebrate the memories of your own childhood, as well as your students' childhoods.

3. Enjoy the challenge of riddles and puzzles that you encounter as you work with young children. Remember that the solutions may be completely buried.

4. Dare to dream and follow your passions. Occasionally, jump *before* you look.

5. Reconsider minor irritations and obstacles as unexpected opportunities for adventure.

6. Share the "ha, ha!" and "ah, ha!" moments with others.

7. Live in the present, and share hope for the future, while learning from the past.

As we ponder what is in children's best interests, remember to listen to and support their teachers. This combination approach produces unbelievable outcomes that can enhance the learning, living and loving chances for both young children and their teachers.

# PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

*Barbara T. Bowman*

(Excerpt from New Directions in Higher Education. *Leadership in Early Care and Education*, eds. Kagan, S. L. & Bowman, B.T. Washington, DC: NAEYC, 1997, p. 108-110. Repirnted by permission.)

The interest of colleges and universities in leadership preparation is evident from the large number and types of programs described in catalogs as leadership oriented and from the amount of research on leadership in the academic literature. Although few of these are designed specifically for the field of early care and education, they do contribute to the training of early childhood leaders.

## DEFINITIONS OF LEADERSHIP

As noted by Kagan and Newman (1997) interest in educational leadership is not new. The three most popular definitions of leadership in the academic literature are of visionary/inspirer, manager, and collaborator. The visionary/inspirer is characterized by Green (1994) as the "heroic" leader who has personal power and transcendent vision. In contrast, the management leader is best described as a technocrat who demonstrates such traits as decisiveness, efficiency, tough-mindedness, emotional blandness, and control (Rogers, 1992). Both heroic and managerial leadership are characterized as top-down approaches.

Collaborative leadership is a more recent entry into the leadership literature. Having arisen from a new view of social, economic, and political relationships, it is described as transformational or empowering, acknowledging the usefulness of cooperation and teamwork. This view envisions a more diverse society in which people of particular castes and classes are not excluded from leadership roles and where professionals, paraprofessionals, and community members work as a team rather than a rigid hierarchical order. Accordingly, collaborative leaders must be able to create partnerships between disparate groups and individuals (Green, 1994), functioning as enabler, servant, collaborator, facilitator, and meaning-maker (Rogers, 1992). Characterized as a bottom-up leadership style, collaborative leadership emphasizes consensus building, shared responsibility, and relationships.

All three aspects of leadership are needed by leaders (Lomotey, 1993), whether they be in early childhood or in other fields. However, the configuration of early childhood programs—goals that promote the development of children and family, staffing patterns that make extensive use of paraprofessionals and volunteers, overlapping staffing roles, resource constraints, and egalitarian social missions—propels the field toward a definition of leadership that is collaborative, distributive, and consensual (Rodd, 1994). It is reassuring that this definition is gaining ground in higher education among researchers, teacher educators, and school reform advocates, and many colleges and universities are moving their leadership programs toward teamwork, mutuality between home and school, interprofessional collaboration, and site- and community-based management.

## LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By far the most common leadership programs are found in departments and schools of education, typically leading to a master's or doctoral degree and/or an administrator's certificate for practice in public schools. Good management predominates as the raison d'etre of these programs, and the corporate model, emphasizing pragmatism and the bottom line, is widespread. These programs stress professional and administration courses; educational psychology, curriculum, research, pedagogy, school finance, school law, personnel management, and technology are among those most frequently offered. A review of course offerings in such programs substantiates what is often noted in the literature on leadership: *manager* and *leader* are terms used interchangeably. . . .

. . . Few educational administration programs identify early childhood as a target for leadership training. A review of recruitment catalogs shows that leadership programs offer courses in curriculum without mention of how the characteristics (philosophical, theoretical, or pedagogical biases) of programs for young children and families might affect leadership. Leithwood (1994) explains the disinterest in early childhood as reflecting the belief that leadership training is more important for secondary-school leaders than for those in elementary, much less primary, education. He contends that the size and complexity of the secondary-school curriculum and the amount of pedagogical content knowledge required for expert teaching require extensive and unique preparation. Early childhood programs are evidently viewed as being simpler because the content . . . is more widely understood.

Probably the most significant change in the thinking about leadership for public schools is the increasing emphasis on teachers as leaders. The traditional top-down approach that is the norm, particularly in large urban school districts, has been challenged by reformers who want to vest greater power in the hands of teachers. Central to this movement is the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), formed to certify expert teachers as professional leaders. The goal of this organization is to "elevate the teaching profession, educate the public about the demands and complexity of excellent practice, and increase our chance of attracting and retaining... talented college graduates with many other promising career options" (NBPTS, 1995, preface). The early childhood standards call for expert teachers to not only provide exemplary education in their own classrooms but also to be able to

> "evaluate school progress and the allocation of school resources in light of their understanding of state and local educational objectives. They are knowledgeable about specialized school and community resources that can be engaged for their students' benefit, and are skilled at employing such resources as needed" (NBPTS, 1995, p. 4).

These standards imply a much broader definition of teacher role than is traditional in public school, vesting teachers with leadership responsibilities for curricula, school improvement, and community relations. While there is considerable enthusiasm in colleges and universities for an expanded role for teachers, it is unclear how teacher education programs will respond to this new definition. Whether the content of teacher training and graduate work in education will change substantively as a result of the new standards is yet to be seen.

## THE KNOWLEDGE BASE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP

An essential component of effective leadership is a sound knowledge base. The care and education of young children was not sufficiently widespread to command much attention from academic researchers until 25 years ago. With an explosion of research on young children and their families, program qualities, and collaborative planning and service integration, a new theoretical framework is developing (Bowman, 1993; Stott & Bowman, 1996). It crosses discipline boundaries and draws on a broad range of social and biological sciences to explain the complexity of human development and lay the basis for professional practice. In the past, university researchers frequently were not concerned with the practical implication of their research or with how it could guide practice in the real world. New perception of the role of research requires balancing experimental methods with real-life and meaning-derived models and creating partnerships among field-based researchers, practitioners, and the subjects themselves, with the goal of improving the lives of the people studied. Thus, data is increasingly collected and interpreted in the context of program, making it more relevant and applicable to practitioners and advocates. The new transdisciplinary, collaborative research fits well with the family-supportive and culturally responsive approach of many early childhood programs and has strongly influenced the development of early childhood practice guidelines (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

The school reform movement also has spawned a wealth of early childhood research that has become part of the knowledge base of the field. This research, showing the potential of early childhood programs to change outcomes for vulnerable children (e.g., Berrueta-Clement et al., 1984; Hubell et al., 1985; NASBE, 1988; Schorr, 1988), has become pivotal, providing conceptual frameworks for policy analysts; coalescing support for early intervention, preschool education, and child care for young children at risk of educational failure; and providing a foundation for professional training.

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# THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

*"At first I thought that this was just a normal room. But it's a room where we care about each other, share information and thoughts. I always wanted to learn from people who were really smart, but I can learn from those who don't know more than me. They learn from you while you learn from them. That way you are creating."*

Jennifer, Grade 3
From Creating Curriculum
Kathy Short and Carolyn Burke (1991)

# THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Creating an appropriate learning environment is essential in the preschool through primary classroom. In this chapter you will find articles from teachers and professional journals concerning the importance of the learning environment. This chapter is divided into the following sections:

## I. Creating a Collaborative Classroom

- ☐ Teacher Story: *School Town, USA* by Marlane Tisdale
- ☐ Teacher Story: *Creating a Collaborative Classroom* by Kay Cahill
- ☐ *What are These Children Doing?* by Sandra Stone

## II. Creating the Learning Environment

- ☐ Introduction
- ☐ Multi-Age and Looping
- ☐ *Nongraded and Mixed-Aged Grouping in Early Childhood Programs* by Lilian Katz
- ☐ *Room Design in the Early Childhood Classroom* by Susan Jaggers
- ☐ Sample Floor Plans
- ☐ Multi-Age Environment Walk Through
- ☐ Learning Centers
- ☐ Letters to Parents Inviting Their Help
- ☐ *Block Play: building a child's mind* by NAEYC
- ☐ *Water Play: A key to children's living-learning environment* by NAEYC
- ☐ Teacher Story: *Sugar Was Her Name* by Marlane Tisdale
- ☐ Pet Care in the Classroom by Brian Seth Perler

## III. The Outdoor Environment

- ☐ Introduction
- ☐ Special Needs Children in the Outdoor Environment

## IV. Technology in the Early Childhood Classroom

- ☐ Teacher Story: *Incorporating Technology into the Curriculum* by Linda L. Mills
- ☐ Technology in the Early Childhood Classroom
- ☐ Teacher Story: *Learning How to Surf the Internet* by Tammy Payton
- ☐ *Technology in early childhood programs* by NAEYC
- ☐ *Technology and young children: What parents should know* by NAEYC

## V. Learning Environment References and Resources

# SCHOOL TOWN, USA

Teacher Story

*Marlane Tisdale*
*MSD Warren Township, Indianapolis*

On the first day of school in the fall, we begin building a community of cooperative learners. Each child learns to recognize that even though individuals in the community of learners are different in some ways, in just as many ways they are alike.

During the year, various curricular areas including math, science, technology, art, social studies, and language arts are integrated around a theme that develops from the children's interests. Throughout the classroom there are learning centers representative of the curricular areas. The children explore these centers daily doing activities that meet their individual needs. All the concepts are presented in developmentally appropriate ways.

As an outgrowth of a study of community helpers, the children initiated the activity of turning the classroom into a town. **SCHOOL TOWN, USA** was voted the name for the town. Dividing themselves into committees, the children began to plan and build their community.

Establishing a bank was top priority. Jeremy stated, "We must build a bank first because without money, our town won't work." They proceeded to make the money, and each child opened an account by depositing $20.00. After the project was underway, the children earned money to increase their accounts. Jeremy was the first to be a bank teller. At the post office, each citizen had his own post office box. The postmaster always had a lot of mail to sort and deliver daily, as the children wrote to friends and family regularly. The pizza parlor and bakery had busy workers who measured, stirred, and compared sizes, while customers waited in line to purchase goodies. The grocer weighed potatoes, rice, and corn, while the shoppers filled their carts with items that were on sale. If you had $1.00 to purchase a ticket, you could visit the science museum, where many interesting items were on display. A large crowd of on-lookers gathered to watch the chicken eggs hatching. Seldom was it necessary to call the police department, as all the citizens usually abided by the rules that the town's people had established. The fire department was always on stand-by if needed. The dentist was available for dental check-ups. Newspaper reporters roamed among the citizens recording news items for the School-Town Gazette. The reporters would go back to their office and put on the computer the news of the day. At the end of the day, each child took home a newspaper to share with his family.

Through fun and meaningful ways, this experience has given each of the children many opportunities to use the various writing, math, language, problem solving, and social skills that they developed during the year. When asked what they learned from their town, Jessica said, "It's fun working, using money, and taking orders in the restaurant." Ty said, "When I grow up I really want to be a newspaper reporter. I know that I will be good at that job." Jacob summed up his feelings by saying, "Someday, I want to be the major of a big town." Nicole quickly responded by saying, "Jacob, I think you mean mayor."

As the teacher, I have found that this experience has been extremely valuable to me in assessing the children. After I walked through the town and watched the children interact with one another and use their acquired knowledge and skills, I was overcome with a real sense of pride. I knew this project approach was very successful! The children initiated this project and, because of that, the learning became meaningful to each of them.

**These children, our next generation of business and community leaders, will never forget their experiences in School Town, USA.**

Teacher Story

# CREATING A COLLABORATIVE CLASSROOM

*Kay Cahill*
*Riley Elementary, Riley*

I know that children learn more effectively when they work together. Creating a classroom environment where my second grade students and I become a team that shares ownership and responsibility is an ever changing challenge.

Teaming and collaboration are also very important for educators. Last year, I had the opportunity to work with Mary Beth Morgan, a consultant with the Indiana Department of Education and a former elementary teacher. Both Mary Beth and I were interested in learning more about creating a collaborative classroom environment with students and decided to explore this together. She was not an outside "expert" coming in and telling me what to do but a coach and collaborator. When Mary Beth came to my classroom, we taught together, set up learning areas, observed each other with students, and gave each other feedback. We asked the children for feedback on the classroom environment and their learning, and we reflected upon their comments, needs, and growth.

Many of the learning opportunities we offered the children worked well, but some didn't. We shared a level of trust that enabled us to try new things in the classroom, push each other's thinking, and ask tough questions. Often educators fear having another adult in the classroom when trying something new in case things don't go perfectly. However, that is the crucial time to have someone else offer her perspective and feedback—not as an evaluator but as a collaborator.

Mary Beth encouraged me to do some professional reading and supplied me with books and articles. A learning cycle started that pushed me to think about how I could set up a classroom that would facilitate social interaction and create a sense of community with the students. In *The Collaborative Classroom* (1990), Susan and Tim Hill state that:

> "Research shows that cooperative learning has significant advantages over individualized and competitive learning environments. Benefits of collaborative learning lead to more advanced cognitive development. Students are motivated to continue learning when they work together. When children change ideas and list problems and their solutions, it contributes to the development of their thinking skills. Children are more able to understand another's perspective and develop better interaction skills. Positive peer relationships are built, and students acquire the skills necessary to work effectively in a group. These skills are essential for learning in school and necessary for success in the workforce" (Hill, 1990, pp. 1-6).

The challenge came in organizing the materials and arranging the classroom to support how children best learn. I decided to do away with individual student desks. We use small and large tables in workshop areas and students keep their supplies in small plastic totes that they can carry from one area to another. I arranged a space in the room for the whole group to meet. Here we can share, think, listen, and plan together. The rest of the room is divided into the five workshop areas.

Our library is in the reading workshop area along with reading notebooks, bean bag chairs, two small tables, chess games, puzzles, a tape recorder, musical instruments, and puppets. This is a flexible area. I can hang a sheet from the drop lights and create a stage for shadow plays. We can set up a tepee or a planetarium where students can go to read, listen, and study. The look of this area often changes according to the focus of our inquiry.

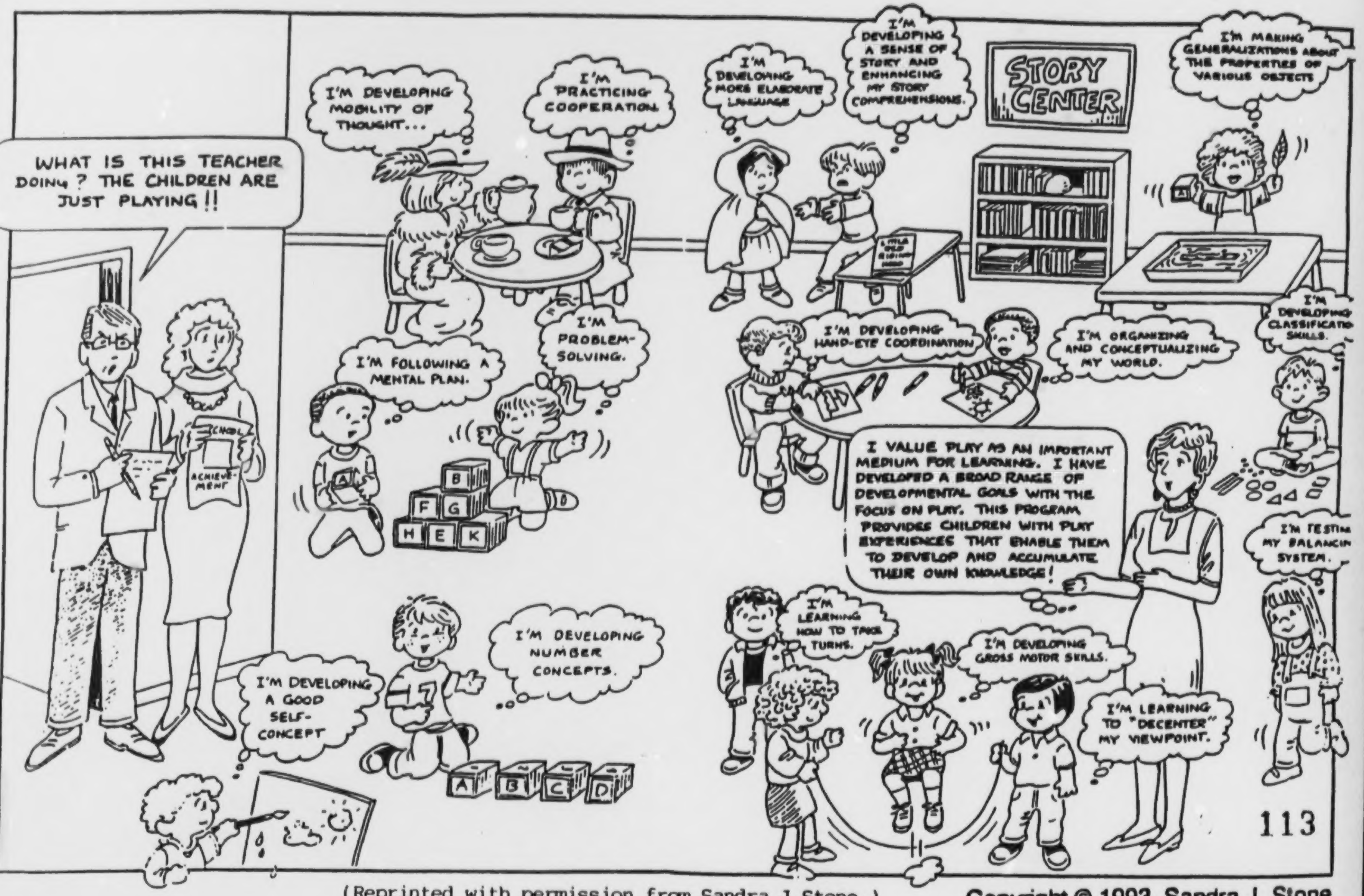
The writing workshop is an area where students can write, peer conference, edit, and publish their work. There is a computer in this area along with dictionaries, maps, writing notebooks, and portfolios. We also keep different types of paper and writing instruments here, along with a chart board for group stories, webbing, brainstorming, and other writing activities. In the math area, there are two computers, a table for projects, and a floor area for using the manipulatives when solving problems. The fourth workshop area is where student artists go to study and work with a variety of materials to express their ideas and reflections.

Thumper the rabbit, Sonic our hedgehog, and Eagle the parakeet live in the science area along with our chameleons and goldfish. There are microscopes, magnets, science books with activities, wooden blocks for building, a toolbox, appliances that can be taken apart and reassembled, graph paper, drawing notebooks, and colored pencils. Materials will change in this area as student scientists observe and question, decide what they want to find out, research, hypothesize, experiment, measure results, predict answers to similar problems, and organize data.

Students are in charge of attendance and the lunch count. They write the weekly classroom newspaper that includes a survey taken by the class mathematician who turns it into a graph on the computer and inserts it in his/her article. The children feed and take care of the animals. They design and create the displays for the bulletin board. Class meetings are scheduled weekly so we can make decisions and so problems can be resolved by solutions agreed upon by the group.

Major emphasis is placed on activities designed to prompt children to ask, "Why?" or "What would happen if...?" type questions. Workshops allow students to explore rather than to memorize facts. We encourage each other to touch materials, investigate their properties by trial and error learning, and then reflect on the value of these activities in our everyday lives.

Yesterday, William was working in the science workshop. I had a battery, a strip of aluminum foil, and a small bulb on the table. I had told the class it was possible to light the bulb with these three items. The first day a few of the students tried but were unable to accomplish the task. Many of the children didn't believe you could light the bulb. William finally discovered how to do it. He just couldn't believe he had figured out what to do. He looked at me and said, "You know Mrs. Cahill, I feel just like I invented something!"


WHAT IS THIS TEACHER DOING ? THE CHILDREN ARE JUST PLAYING !!
SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT
I'M DEVELOPING MOBILITY OF THOUGHT...
I'M PRACTICING COOPERATION
I'M DEVELOPING MORE ELABORATE LANGUAGE
I'M DEVELOPING A SENSE OF STORY AND ENHANCING MY STORY COMPREHENSIONS.
STORY CENTER
I'M MAKING GENERALIZATIONS ABOUT THE PROPERTIES OF VARIOUS OBJECTS
I'M FOLLOWING A MENTAL PLAN.
I'M PROBLEM-SOLVING.
B
F G
H E K
I'M DEVELOPING HAND-EYE COORDINATION
I'M ORGANIZING AND CONCEPTUALIZING MY WORLD.
I'M DEVELOPING CLASSIFICATIO SKILLS.
I VALUE PLAY AS AN IMPORTANT MEDIUM FOR LEARNING. I HAVE DEVELOPED A BROAD RANGE OF DEVELOPMENTAL GOALS WITH THE FOCUS ON PLAY. THIS PROGRAM PROVIDES CHILDREN WITH PLAY EXPERIENCES THAT ENABLE THEM TO DEVELOP AND ACCUMULATE THEIR OWN KNOWLEDGE!
I'M TESTIN MY BALANCIN SYSTEM.
I'M DEVELOPING NUMBER CONCEPTS.
7
I'M DEVELOPING A GOOD SELF-CONCEPT
A B C D
I'M LEARNING HOW TO TAKE TURNS.
I'M DEVELOPING GROSS MOTOR SKILLS.
I'M LEARNING TO "DECENTER" MY VIEWPOINT.

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# II. Creating the Learning Environment

Creating an appropriate learning environment is an essential part of the preschool through primary program. The environment should invite children to have experiences and participate in activities which nurture the joy of creating, discovering, exploring, experimenting, and observing. The setting should encourage a **community of learners** where all the children contribute to the social and academic well-being of the class. "The early childhood classroom is a community in which each child is valued. Children learn to respect and acknowledge differences in abilities and talents and to value each person for his or her strengths" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 16).

The design of the learning environment and program should take into account the need for social relationships. Children's development and learning are reinforced when the opportunity to play, work, and talk with other children and adults is a natural part of the life in the classroom. "The learning environment enables children to construct understanding through interactions with adults and other children" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 16). The children should take an active part in the creation of the environment. The teacher works "*with* students rather than doing things *to* them, and the learners' interests and questions drive much of the curriculum" (Kohn, 1996, p. 54).

The learning environment is designed to support the child's physical and cognitive needs. The child needs to feel safe and secure; he needs activity, stimulation, fresh air, rest, and nourishment. The environment "protects children's psychological safety; that is, children feel secure, relaxed, and comfortable rather than disengaged, frightened, worried, or stressed" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 17).

Many interconnected factors are involved in creating an environment that maximizes learning. The total program should be one where children are allowed to develop at their own pace regardless of age. The classroom employs methods grounded in hands-on learning, cooperative learning, play, and exploration.

The physical environment, both indoor and outdoor, contributes to the creation of an appropriate place for learning. This includes room arrangement, variety and appropriateness of materials, playground equipment, and use of the outdoor play area.

When examining the classroom environment, a teacher needs to ask: What do I see? Is the room inviting to children or is it institutional and teacher-made? The walls of a learner-centered classroom are covered with students' work, lists, signs, exhibits, and evidence of collaboration reflecting the children who spend time in this room. They are not covered with commercially purchased posters, rules created only by adults, sticker charts, and flawless work. Because the classroom is for children, it reflects children's interests, tastes, and activities. A warm and friendly atmosphere pervades the room with areas for movement, small and large group activities, and places where a child can be alone. The materials and manipulatives are arranged for easy access by children. The furniture is arranged to facilitate interaction and accommodate different activities taking place at the same time.

An appropriate learning environment and program incorporates all facets of a child's life. Children grow and develop through predictable stages but at individual rates. All classrooms are replete with a variety of individual developmental levels and learning styles. For any program to be successful and effective, its environment must respond to the individual needs and growth patterns of each child.

Whether the classroom is single grade or multi-age, teachers and administrators need to begin with the basic idea that an ideal learning environment is one that "promotes deep understanding, excitement about learning, and social as well as intellectual growth" (Kohn, 1996, p. 54). Every classroom is a unique environment that should be a place to learn, think, explore, and discover. Throughout this section of the guide are samples and examples from research and from educators around the state. These are to be used to stimulate ideas for designing and creating the learning environment.

# MULTI-AGE AND LOOPING

In examining appropriate learning environments for children, educators may want to look at the principles of the multi-age classroom. In a multi-age classroom, a mixed-age group of children stays with the same teacher for several years. For example, in a first and second grade multi-age class, a classroom may contain children with ages ranging from five to eight with approximately half the children being five or six years of age. These children will remain with the teacher two years while the seven- and eight-year-olds move on to the next level, and a new group of five and six-year-olds move into the class.

According to Dr. Sandra Stone (1996), these children should be selected at random and balanced by age, ability, and gender. This grouping is not made for reasons of economics, curriculum, or convenience but solely for the benefit of the children. It is not a combination class where children are taught their designated grade level curricula. "Ages and grades do not divide this community of learners within the classroom. Rather, in the multi-age community, every child in the family can become a successful learner *on his own continuum of growth*" (Stone, 1996, p. vii).

In any classroom, children vary in their developmental progress. In a multi-age classroom, with ages often spanning one to four years, this difference is even greater. The diversity among children adds to the richness of the group. The majority of the components in multi-age classroom practices closely match those listed as developmentally appropriate by NAEYC (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997); they reflect a philosophy of learning that is child-centered, experiential, reflective, authentic, social, democratic, cognitive, constructive, and challenging.

Successful multi-age classrooms require teachers to shift attention from teaching curriculum to teaching children (Stone, 1995). By observing and interacting with each individual, teachers are able to determine the current stages of development and the strengths and needs of each child. The teacher must be flexible and knowledgeable in all areas of curriculum planning. In order for the child to be able to connect any new learning to prior knowledge, the curriculum content must be relevant, engaging, and meaningful to the child. It is planned with concrete materials and experiences for the child to think about and investigate. Curriculum and instruction are created with the children and are adapted so that all students are engaged in the learning experience. This allows each child to succeed while being continually challenged. The responsibility for active learning is transferred from the teacher to the student.

In a multi-age classroom, teachers are flexible in their use of a variety of teaching strategies, materials, and classroom organization. As in any classroom, the curricula should stem from the unique constitution and interests of each group of children. Teachers provide a variety of methods by which to approach learning tasks in order to expand children's thinking skills and personal responsibility.

The physical environment of a multi-age classroom must be as flexible as the curriculum. It should provide for movement, cooperative social interaction, concrete learning experiences, choice, flexible groupings, autonomous learning, and fun (Stone, 1996). If there are desks in the room, they may constantly be grouped and regrouped. Centers may be located around the room offering various hands-on projects, open-ended experiences, and self-directed activities. The areas are accessible for all students and supplied with a variety of multi-age materials. Students are responsible for all materials and their own personal files and folders.

These rich, engaging classrooms may be run as workshops using learning logs, cooperative groups, conferences, portfolios, and other activities. For example, the children choose their own topics for writing in the writer's workshop. They work at their own level to develop rough drafts, conference with the teacher, join in heterogeneous peer writing groups to reflect and respond, and publish in the technology or book-making centers.

The multi-age classroom utilizes teaching and curriculum practices that maximize the benefits of interaction and cooperation among children of various ages. Children have the opportunity to work in groups that are temporary and can be changed with learning experiences and skills needed at the moment. Students may be temporarily grouped homogeneously for some subjects or activities, and, at other times, children learn in heterogeneous groups. They contribute to group projects and activities according to their interests and skill level. In doing so, the unique contributions and abilities of each child are recognized and valued by others. This flexible grouping also allows for social development within the classroom. Children with different experiences and stages of development are encouraged to help each other with all aspects of classroom activity. The teacher, as facilitator, makes sure every child has an opportunity to participate and make contributions.

A variety of benefits can be obtained from such interaction, especially in the early years. "The teacher is not the only one who is knowledgeable and capable, and consequently, many roles are taken on by children. These roles can be both academic and social, supporting older students' learning as well" (Kasten, 1994, p.3). The younger children learn from the older students as well as the teacher. This allows the younger children to anticipate what "they will be able to do, allowed to do, or capable of learning" (Kasten, 1994, p.4). The younger children become the older helpers the next year and, because teaching is a powerful learning tool, grow academically. The multi-age classroom can also provide an environment with fewer incidents of aggressive or immature behavior and become one which is safe and nurturing (McClellan & Kinsey, 1996).

A multi-age classroom supports the development of both intellectual and academic competence. Guided by the teacher, each child is given an opportunity to record, reflect, and evaluate his own work. During this process, the child determines where improvement is needed and is then able to set her own obtainable goals for the future. Assessment activities are formative, and progress is reported in comparison to the student's previous performance and developmental stage. Children in a multi-age classroom are able to appreciate and understand their own progress, and, at the same time, acquire an understanding of the continuity of development (Katz, 1995).

Schools considering multi-age classrooms should take several steps to guide planning and successful development. All stakeholders should research as much information about multi-age as possible; there is not one model for becoming a multi-age classroom or school. Change needs to come from several directions, not just bottom-up or top-down. Multi-age requires change, and teachers need time and professional development to facilitate success.

## MULTI-AGE BENEFITS

- ✓ increases a cooperative and collaborative attitude in which children work and share together regardless of age
- ✓ increases a sense of stability as a result of consistency
- ✓ reduces competition and makes learning the real focus
- ✓ curriculum is developed with a range of activities for different ages, interests, learning styles and rates
- ✓ favors socialization, independence, responsibility, and interaction
- ✓ develops a sense of family by sharing the classroom with many of the same children and teachers more than one year
- ✓ younger children experience the benefits of having older role models and grow into the role of the older student
- ✓ more time efficient with less time allotted to establishing routines and expectations
- ✓ places learning in a stable, life-like environment (Copeland, 1994)

## LOOPING

The multi-year sequence, looping, can also help the classroom become an interdependent community of learners (Jacoby, 1994). Looping is the concept of placing students and teachers together for two or more years. This process differs from the multi-age classroom in that the teacher teaches a standard grade level and moves to the next level with the same group of children. Looping requires two teachers working on a two-year cycle. The two teachers must form a partnership to teach two different grade levels but in alternate years. These teachers will need support, materials, and time. Time is needed to plan and organize the multi-year programs, as well as time to share, compare, and analyze the experiences and challenges.

In the looping process, a teacher can better follow and understand a child's growth and development. The teacher has continual information about the child's interests, abilities, and learning styles. Many advantages in both social and academic development of children have been identified when using the looping process. At the beginning of the second year, less time is taken for getting acquainted with the children and review of previously taught skills and concepts. This transition creates stability and routine in the children's lives which in turn increases cognitive, social, and emotional growth. It can minimize fear, anxiety, and frustration on the part of all stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, and administrators) about the new school year and the new teacher after the first year. The continuity enables the teacher to develop a safe and supportive environment. This climate produces increased self-confidence in children, which may be particularly beneficial to the shy and quiet child.

Greater communication with parents can also be a benefit of the multi-year process. Parents, like their children, seem to be more at ease with a teacher the second year. Many tend to offer more voluntary assistance. Both the parents and the teacher have a greater opportunity to reflect on the growth of the child over a longer period of time.

**ERIC** Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
University of Illinois
51 Gerty Drive
Champaign, Illinois 61820-7469

Phone: (800) 583-4135
(217) 333-1386
Fax: (217) 333-3767
Email: ericeece@uiuc.edu

# Nongraded and Mixed-Age Grouping in Early Childhood Programs

*Lilian G. Katz, Ph. D.*

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EDO-PS-92-9

Interest in the potential benefits of mixed-age grouping in preschools and the early primary grades has increased steadily in recent years (Willis, 1991). Two large-scale mandates to "ungrade" the first years of schooling are receiving a great deal of attention from educators. One is the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1989 and the other is the provincial mandate of British Columbia in Canada for ungraded classes in the primary years. These initiatives are likely to be followed in several states where similar efforts are under consideration (e.g., Oregon).

Among the reasons behind the trend toward mixed-age grouping are widespread concern about the high proportion of young children who are retained in the early grades, increasing recognition that grade repetition does not help children overcome difficulties in meeting narrow and specific grade achievement expectations, attempts to implement developmentally appropriate teaching and curriculum practices in the early grades, and growing awareness of the potential benefits of cross-age interaction to intellectual and social development (Katz et al., 1990).

## CONFUSION OF TERMS

A confusing variety of terms is used in discussions of theoretical and practical issues surrounding age grouping practices. Sometimes the terms UNGRADED, NONGRADED, CONTINUOUS PROGRESS, MIXED- or MULTI-AGE GROUPING are used interchangeably (Willis, 1991). The terms SPLIT and BLENDED CLASSES are also used. The mixed-age grouping widely practiced in Britain during the so-called Plowden years was often called FAMILY GROUPING or VERTICAL GROUPING. The purpose of this digest is to examine the terms and distinctive connotations of the terms that may have important implications for teaching and the curriculum. Broad definitions are suggested under the following four headings:

## NONGRADED OR UNGRADED GROUPING

The terms NONGRADED and UNGRADED typically refer to grouping children in classes without grade-level designations and with more than a one-year age span. When these terms were introduced by Goodlad and Anderson (1959), the primary rationale was to increase the heterogeneity of class composition and thereby liberate teachers and children from rigid achievement expectations linked to a pupil's age. However, Goodlad and Anderson found that implementation of nongraded or ungraded classes in the late 1950s and thereafter tended to result in grouping children homogeneously for instruction on the basis of ability and achievement level, regardless of their ages. Studies of these programs reveal two significant misunderstandings: "The first is the failure to understand that nongrading is a scheme for organizing schools vertically. The second is the false assumption that a scheme of school reorganization automatically changes other educational practices" (Goodlad and Anderson, 1963; Goodlad and Anderson, 1987; Shinn, 1967).

In many implementations of nongradedness, children in a class or across classes are placed in regular or temporary groups for specific instruction in basic skills regardless of their age. In this approach to nongradedness, the main goal is to increase the homogeneity of ability of instructional groups rather than the interaction across ability groups. In other words, the terms NONGRADED and UNGRADED refer to grouping practices in which ages are mixed, but the primary purpose is to homogenize groups of children for instruction on bases other than age.

### COMBINED GRADES

Combined classes include more than one grade level in a classroom. Such groupings are sometimes referred to as SPLIT or BLENDED or DOUBLE YEAR classes. Combined classes usually include the required curriculum for each of the two grades represented, although some class activities may be conducted with children of both grades combined. This kind of grouping occurs frequently in small schools, and occasionally in larger ones when the number of children in different age cohorts fluctuates. The main goal of these kinds of classes appears to be to maximize personnel and space resources rather than to capitalize on the diversity of ability and experience in the groups with mixed ages.

### CONTINUOUS PROGRESS

This term has a variety of meanings, but generally implies that children remain with their classroom peers in an age cohort regardless of whether they have met or surpassed prespecified grade-level achievement expectations. The CONTINUOUS PROGRESS term is usually associated with a strong emphasis on individualizing the curriculum so that teaching and learning tasks are responsive to the previous experiences and rates of progress of each child regardless of age. This practice is sometimes called SOCIAL PROMOTION. The main rationale for the practice is that separation from one's age cohort may stigmatize a child. Like the nongraded and ungraded approaches, programs focused on continuous progress are not primarily aimed at maximizing the educational benefits of children of different ages and abilities learning together. Rather, the goal is to let children progress according to their individual rates of learning and development without being compelled to meet age-related achievement expectations.

### MIXED-AGE OR MULTI-AGE GROUPING

This term refers to grouping children so that the age span of the class is greater than one year, as in the nongraded or ungraded approach. The terms MIXED-AGE and MULTI-AGE GROUPING are used to emphasize the goal of using teaching and curriculum practices that maximize the benefits of interaction and cooperation among children of various ages. In mixed- or multi-age classes, teachers encourage children with different experiences and stages of development to turn to each other for help with all aspects of classroom activity, including the mastery and application of basic literacy and numeracy skills. However, in mixed-age classes, teachers use small temporary subgroupings of children who need the same kinds of instruction to help them acquire basic skills.

### IMPLICATIONS OF EACH GROUPING

Although the distinctions between the grouping practices implied by the terms defined above may seem slight, they have significant implications for practice. The ungraded or nongraded approach acknowledges that age is a crude indicator of what children are ready to learn. It emphasizes regrouping children for instruction on the basis of perceived readiness to acquire knowledge and skills, and not according to age. It does not emphasize educational benefits of a learning environment in which children at different knowledge and skill levels work together. In other words, the main goal implied by the term NONGRADED is that of homogenizing children for instruction according to achievement instead of age, even though this was not the original rationale for introducing the term (Lewis, 1969).

Several kinds of combined grades and continuous progress practices do not set out to increase the sense of family within the class or encourage children with different levels of knowledge and experience to learn together. In contrast, MIXED-AGE GROUPING involves class composition that takes advantage of the hetero-geneity of experience, knowledge, and skills in a group of children with an age range of more than one year (Katz et al., 1990). Research on cross-age interaction in spontaneous, experimental, and educational settings indicates that a variety of developmental and educational benefits can be obtained from such interaction, especially in the early years (Balaban, 1991). Elkind (1989) recommends mixed-age grouping as a developmentally appropriate alternative to a rigid lock-step curriculum and as a way to strengthen teachers' sensitivity to the normal variability of children's developmental trajectories in a single age group.

Mixed-age grouping can provide older children with the opportunity to be helpful, patient, and tolerant of younger peers' competencies, and thus give them some of the desirable early experiences of being nurturant that underlie parenting and helping others who are different from oneself. Exposure to older children as nurturers provides young recipients with models of behavior they can emulate when they become the older members of a group. Research on cross-age interaction, peer tutoring, and cooperative learning indicates that an age range of greater than one year can provide a level of intellectual stimulation that supports the development of both intellectual and academic competence. This sort of learning environment is also likely to generate greater social benefits than same-age groups, especially for children who are at-risk in particular social development categories (Katz et al., 1990).

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Grouping children in classes with a wide age range cannot by itself yield the benefits implied by the research on cross-age interaction and multi-age grouping. If these benefits are to be realized, the curriculum must be modified to provide a variety of activities in which children work together on projects and other activities, preferably in small multi-age groups in which each individual can contribute in different ways to the total effort (Katz and Chard, 1989; Blumenfeld et al., 1991).

Teaching strategies likely to result in children's realizing the benefits of a wide age range include encouraging more knowledgeable and experienced children to assist less able ones, regardless of age, as needed; encouraging younger children to request assistance from more competent classmates; and encouraging older and more experienced children to take responsibility for helping the others.

Each grouping arrangement has its risks. A risk of homogeneous age grouping is that some children will become acutely aware of failing to live up to normative expectations for behavior and achievement for their age. Risks of mixed-age grouping are those of younger children becoming burdens to older ones and being overwhelmed by more competent classmates. Teachers must keep in mind the risk of overlooking older and more experienced children's need for challenge, but this is the case in every class, even when student age is not a factor. Research on mixed-age grouping suggests that in spite of its risks, its potential advantages outweigh its disadvantages (Katz et al., 1990).

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# ROOM DESIGN IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM

*Susan Jaggers*
*Southern Heights Elementary, Fort Wayne*

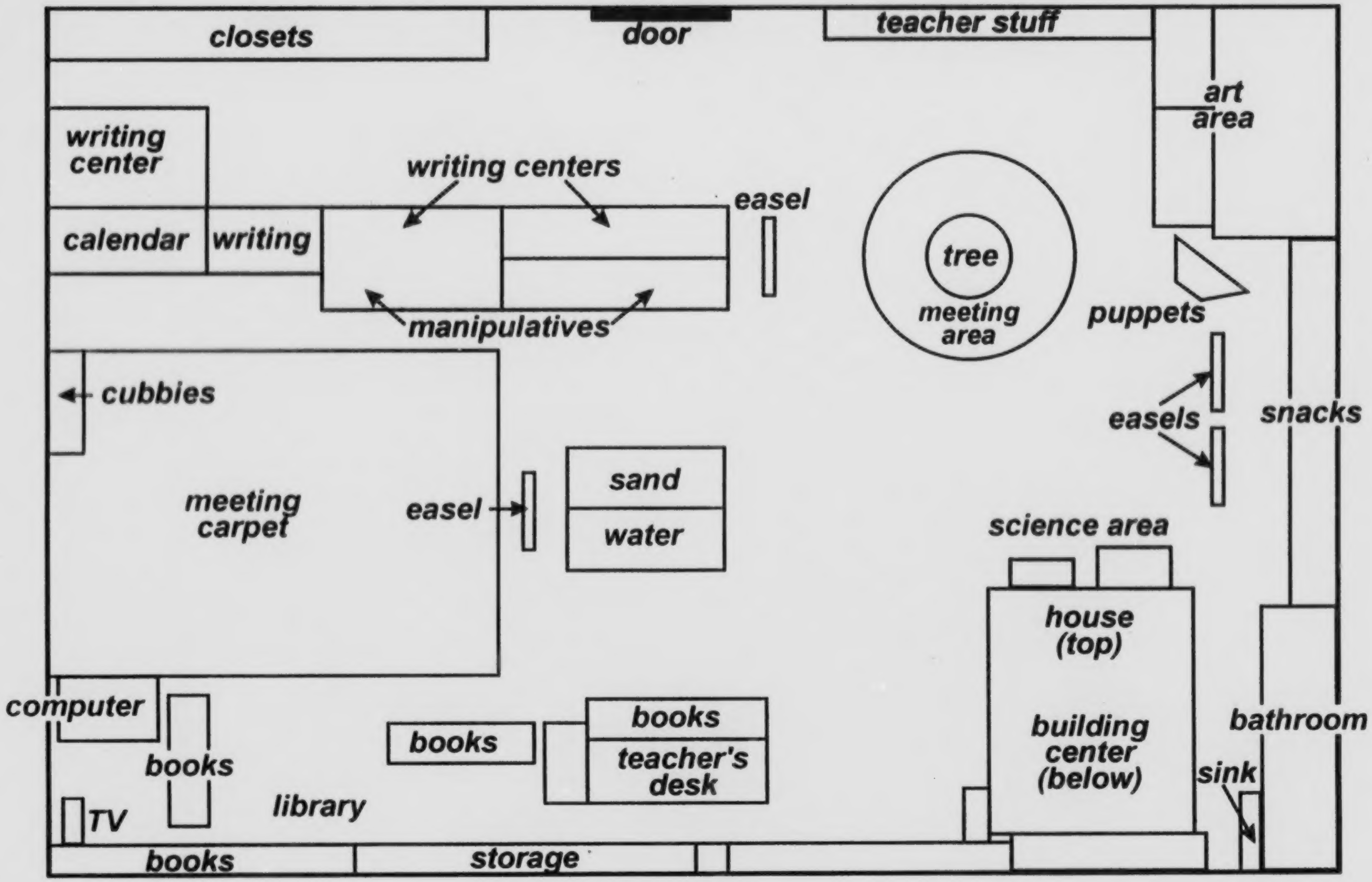
The importance of room design in the early childhood classroom should not be underestimated. Careful planning and arrangement can make a great difference in how children learn, behave, and interact with others.

Begin by working on the room design when the classroom is empty. Make several different sketches of possible arrangements. As you plan, look at the room from a child's viewpoint; sit on the floor and look around. Consider using defined spaces for learning centers and provide clear pathways for walking from one area to another. Remember to place noisy learning centers and quiet ones in different sections of the room. Leave a section of the room open for movement, music, large muscle, and group experiences. The carpeted group area can also double as a place for working with manipulatives and other activities.

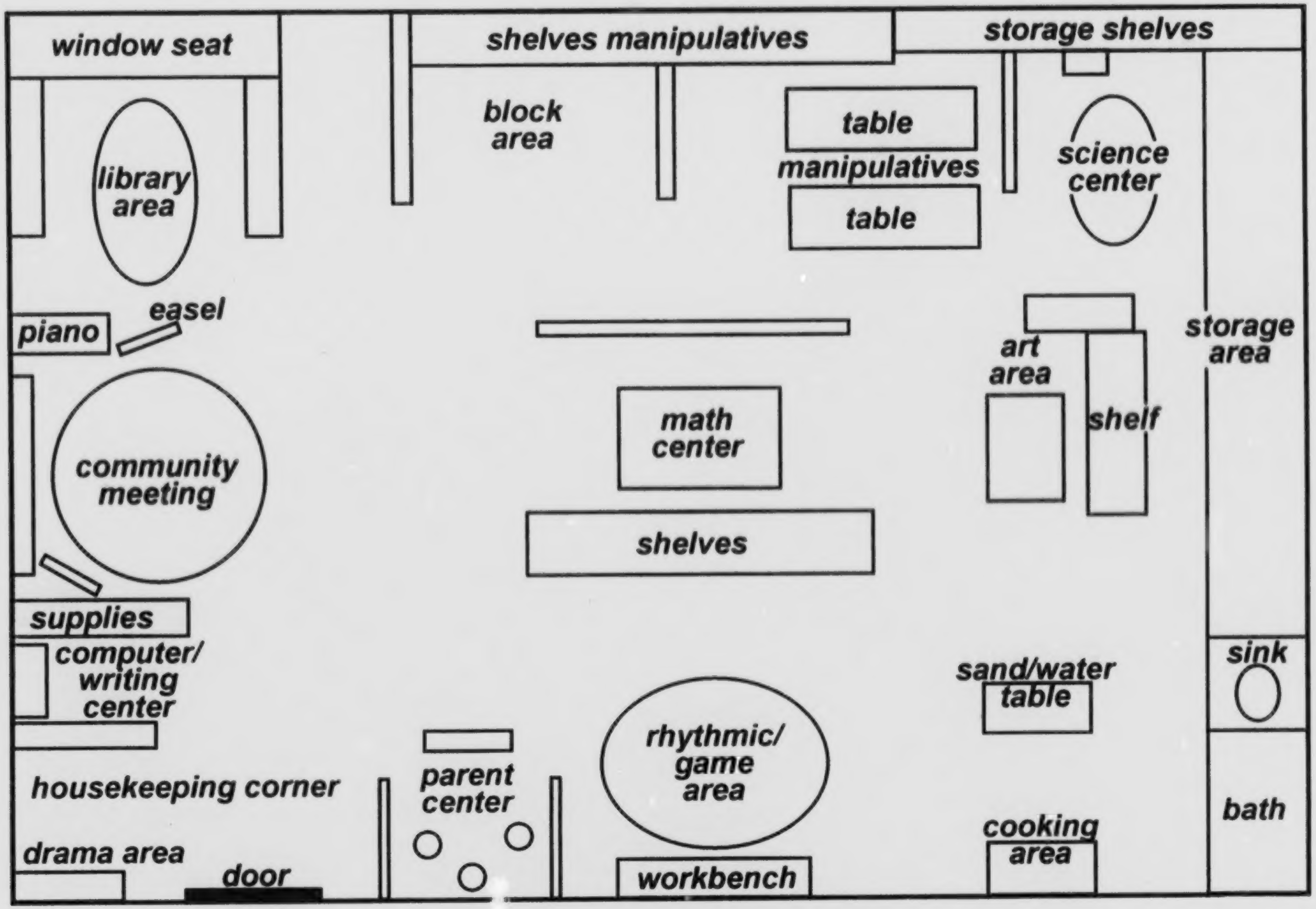
Keep in mind that early childhood classrooms can quickly become overstimulating to young children. Limit the color scheme to one or two cool tone colors accented by the toys and artwork. Leave some wall spaces completely empty! What is on the walls should pertain to the current theme. Let the children organize and design what goes on the walls and bulletin boards. Materials (blocks, manipulatives, books, folders) can be organized by using baskets, milk crates, vegetable crates, and decorated boxes for storage containers. To help children return objects to the correct place, put a photo or picture of the material on the shelf where each container belongs. Soft pillows, plants, small lamps, curtains, placemats, and area rugs can make a classroom look more inviting. Avoid using large pieces of furniture which may block your view of children or take up valuable play space. Above all when designing a classroom, be certain to consider the safety of the children. Carpets and breakable items should be secured, sharp edges need to be covered, and dangerous items should be out of the reach of children.

Throughout the school year, be flexible with the room arrangement. Learning centers can be altered, added, or deleted. If an area is not working, consider how it can be changed. Perceive the room as a home away from home. Try to make the classroom environment comfortable for everyone. Spend some valuable time and enjoy!

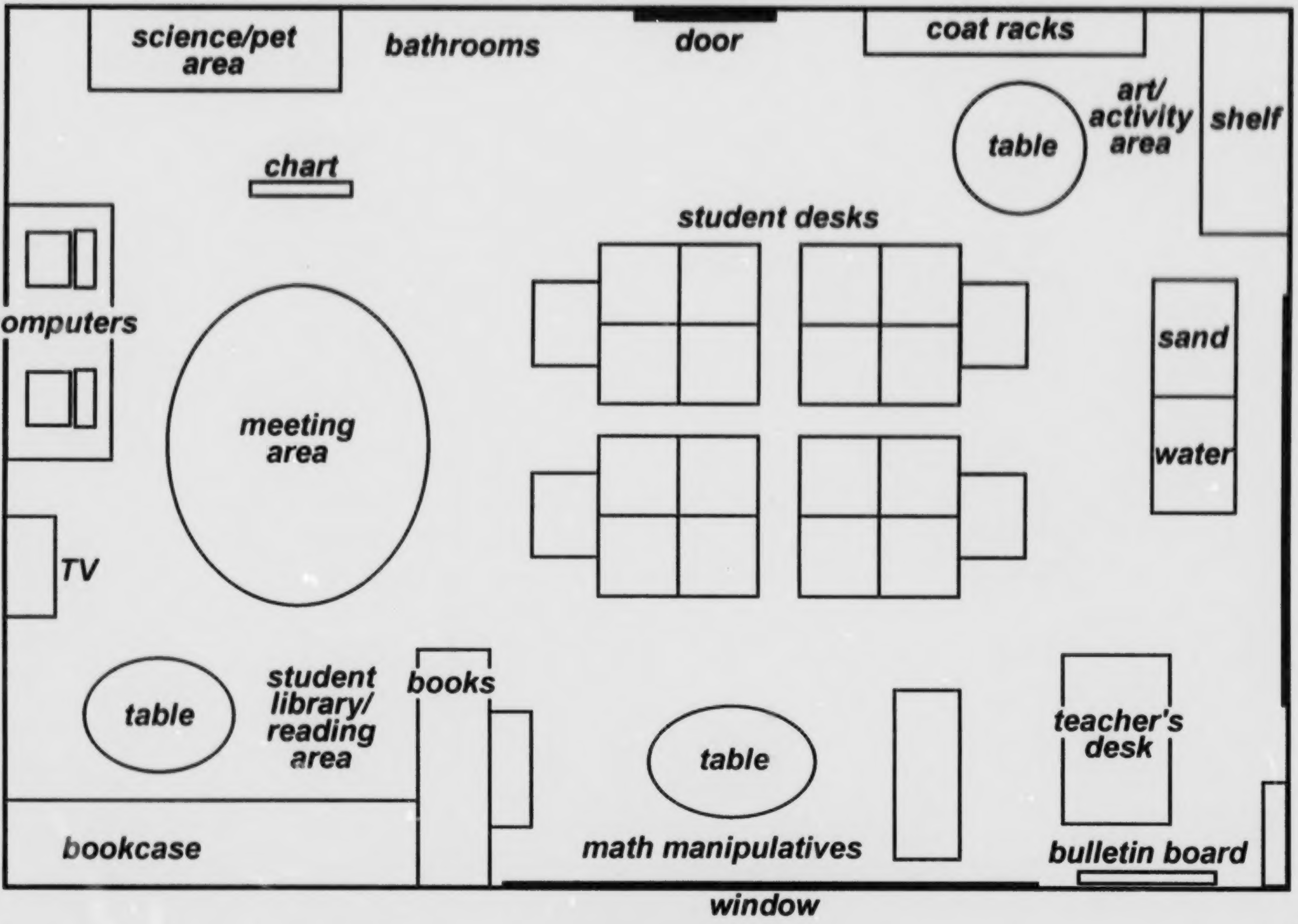
In planning the classroom arrangement, a teacher should take into account learning and teaching styles, learning needs, and the physical facility. Teachers should take time and visit other classrooms, including classrooms at grade levels different from their own. Taking time to examine research concerning classroom design, and actually viewing how certain areas work, will help a teacher in designing the most appropriate room for and *with* the children. On the next few pages are examples of various room designs. Even though the room designs are organized by grade, most primary classrooms can incorporate the ideas from any level into their own design.


closets
door
teacher stuff
art area
writing center
writing centers
easel
calendar
writing
tree
meeting area
manipulatives
puppets
cubbies
easels
snacks
meeting carpet
easel
sand
water
science area
house (top)
building center (below)
computer
books
books
books
teacher's desk
bathroom
sink
TV
library
books
storage

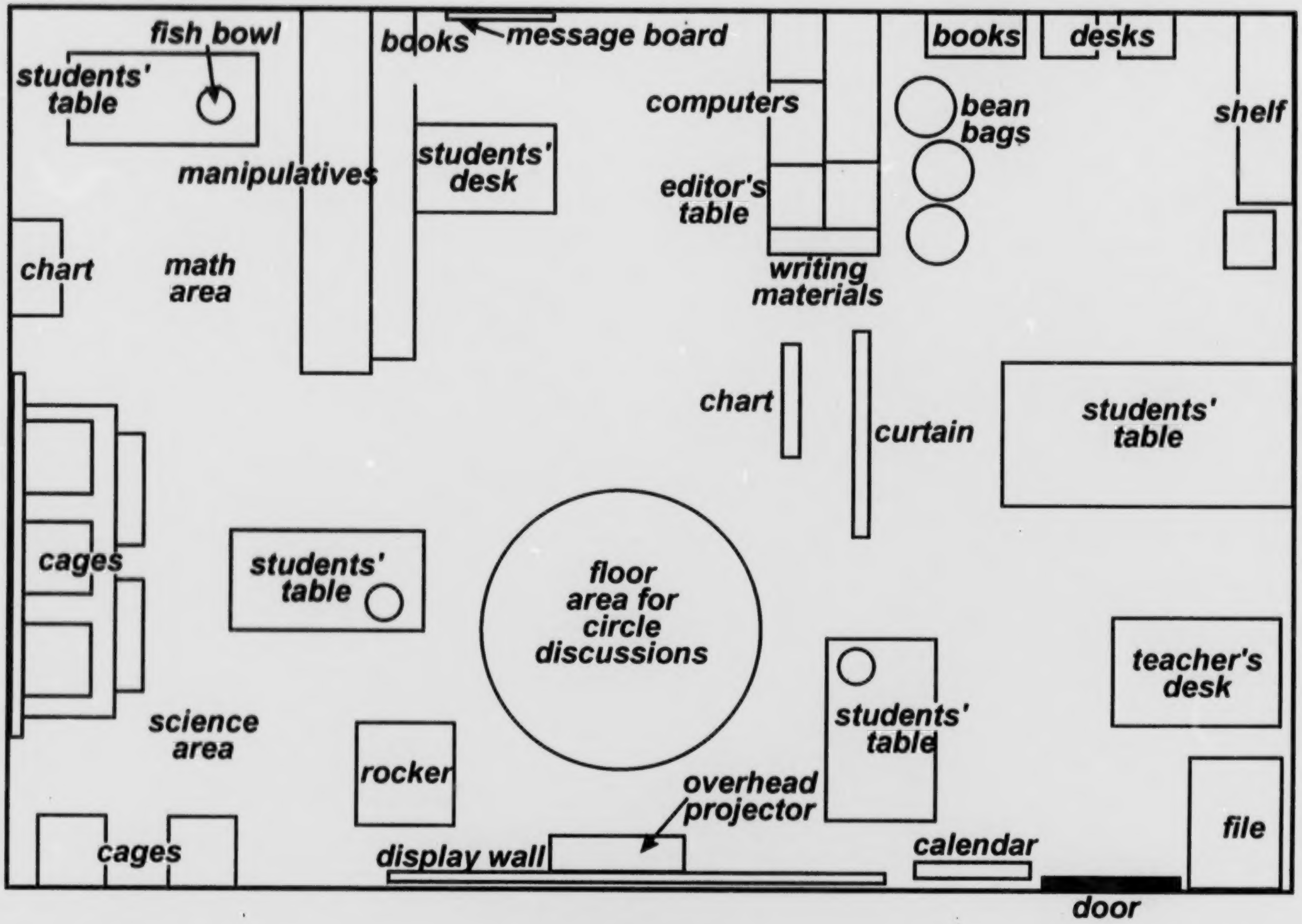
Sample Pre-School


window seat
shelves manipulatives
storage shelves
block area
table
manipulatives
table
science center
library area
piano
easel
art area
storage area
math center
shelf
community meeting
shelves
supplies
computer/ writing center
sand/water table
sink
rhythmic/ game area
housekeeping corner
parent center
bath
cooking area
drama area
door
workbench

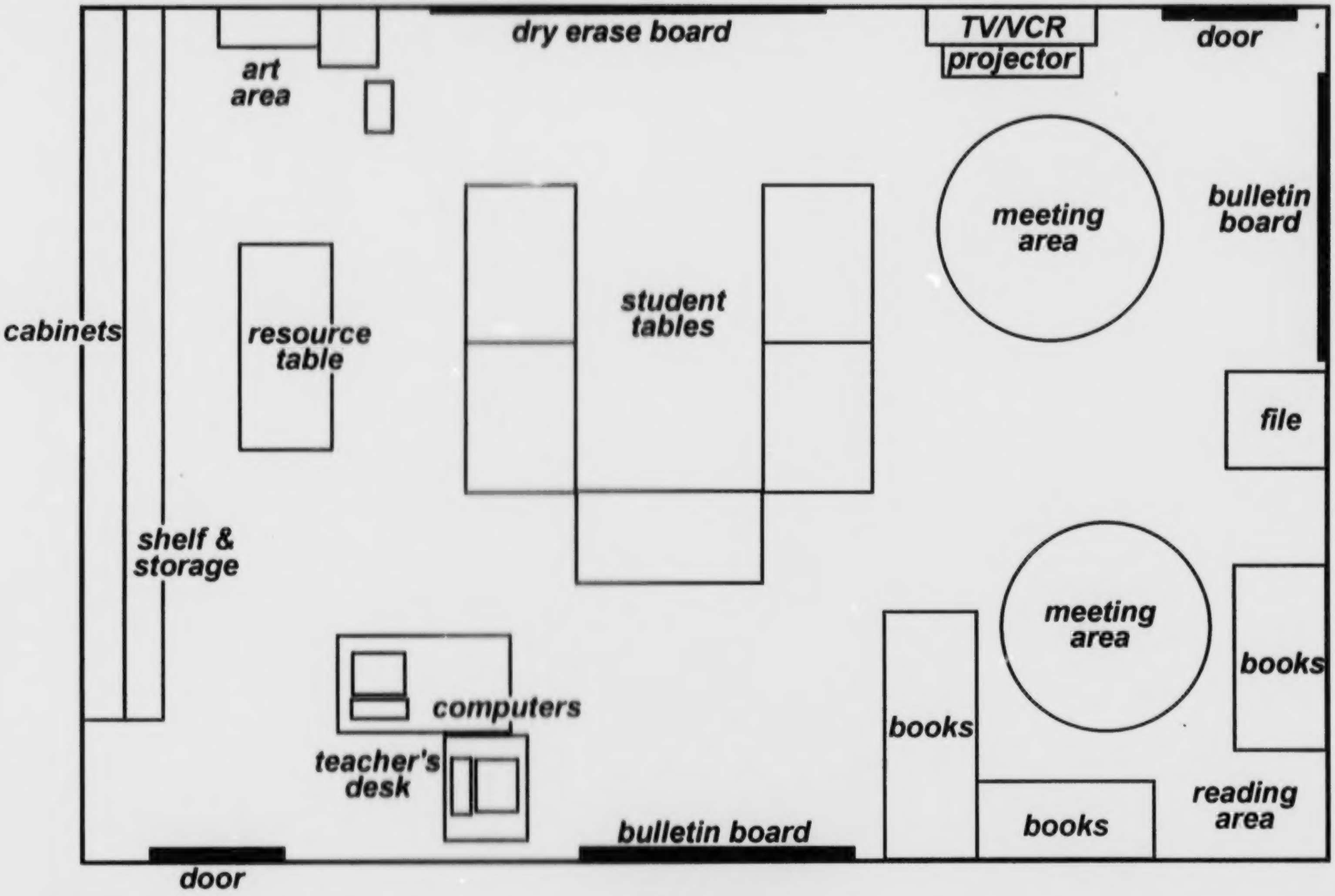
Sample
Kindergarten


science/pet area
bathrooms
door
coat racks
table
art/ activity area
shelf
chart
student desks
computers
meeting area
sand
water
TV
table
student library/ reading area
books
table
teacher's desk
bookcase
math manipulatives
bulletin board
window

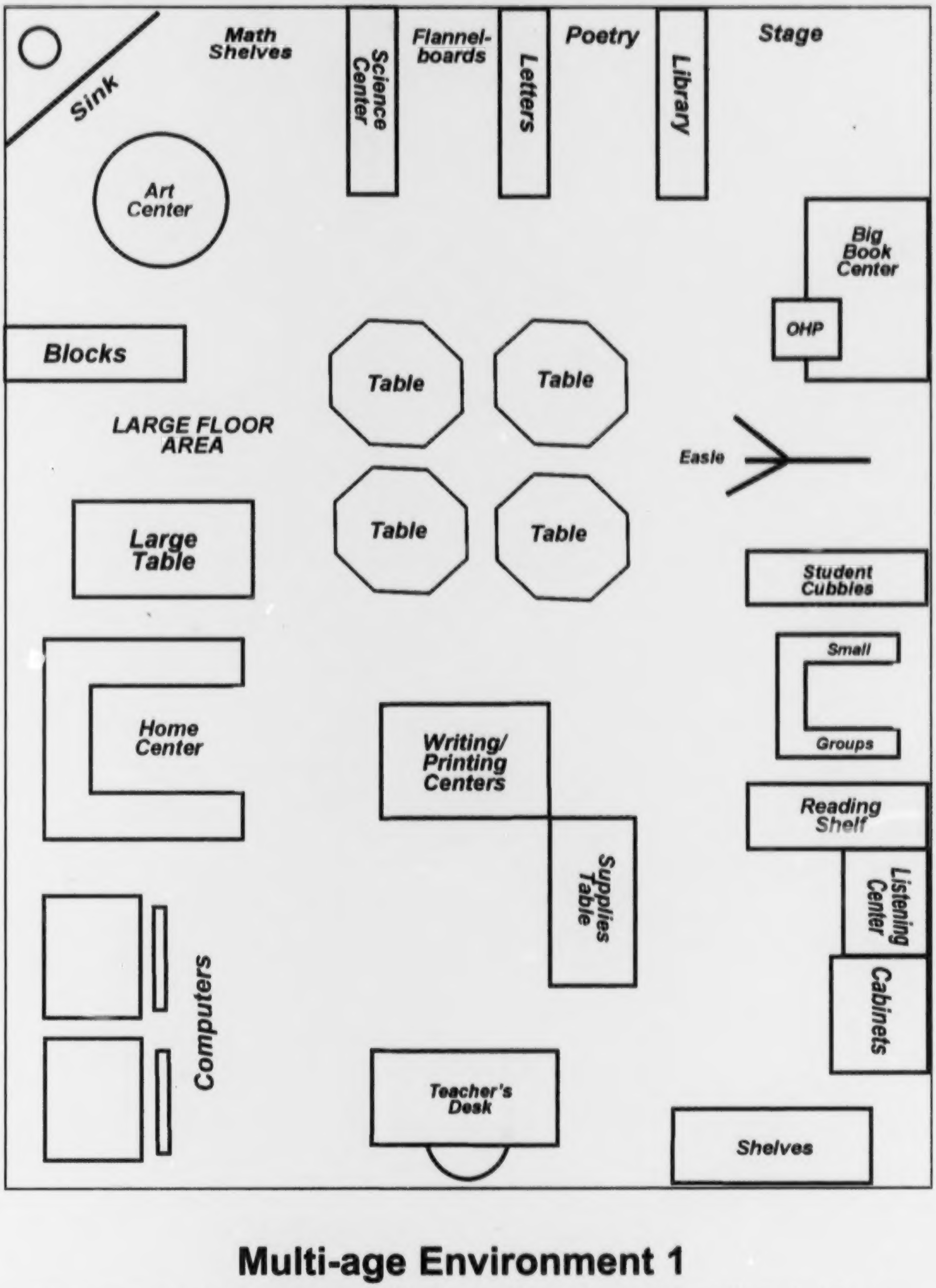
Sample
First Grade


fish bowl
students' table
manipulatives
books
message board
students' desk
computers
editor's table
writing materials
books
desks
bean bags
shelf
chart
math area
chart
curtain
students' table
cages
students' table
floor area for circle discussions
students' table
teacher's desk
science area
rocker
overhead projector
cages
display wall
calendar
file
door

**Sample
Second Grade**


dry erase board
TV/VCR
projector
door
art
area
bulletin
board
meeting
area
cabinets
resource
table
student
tables
file
shelf &
storage
meeting
area
books
computers
books
teacher's
desk
reading
area
bulletin board
books
door

Sample
Third Grade


Sink
Math Shelves
Science Center
Flannel-boards
Letters
Poetry
Library
Stage
Art Center
Big Book Center
OHP
Blocks
Table
Table
LARGE FLOOR AREA
Easle
Table
Table
Large Table
Student Cubbies
Small
Groups
Home Center
Writing/ Printing Centers
Reading Shelf
Supplies Table
Listening Center
Cabinets
Computers
Teacher's Desk
Shelves

Multi-age Environment 1

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# MULTI-AGE ENVIRONMENT WALK THROUGH

Let's walk through **Multi-age Classroom Environment 1** on the previous page for a better understanding of how the environment "works" for the teacher and children.

Starting at the upper right-hand side, walk around the classroom clockwise past the **Big Book Center**, the **OHP** (overhead projector), **the Easel**, and a **Language Group Area**, used during large-group instruction. Such instruction takes place as the children sit on a carpeted floor area, allowing for community and intimacy between you and the children as well as among the children. This is preferable to children sitting at desks. Teachers conduct Shared Book, Modeled Writing, Writer's Workshop, Read-Alouds, and various other group experiences in the large-group area. Children also use this area during center time to read Big Books, read stories, or solve math problems on the overhead projector, and read books from the library.

Children may place their individual belongings in the **Student Cubbies**. Since the classroom does not have individual desks, it is important that each child has a private place to put her own things. A child's cubby is accessible at all times to the child. Notes, letters, reminders, and student work are delivered directly to the cubbies.

At the **Small-Group Table**, small, flexible groupings can gather, usually with the teacher while other children are engaged in centers or projects. A horseshoe-shaped table works well. Here, the teacher may work with children on Guided Reading, Literature Circles, math instruction, editing, and conferencing. The **Reading Shelf** contains multiple copies of literature for Guided Reading and Literature Circles.

The **Listening Center** consists of several tape recorders with two earphones for each recorder so that a pair of children may listen to a story from one recorder. The Listening Center accommodates four to six children at a time. Books and tapes hang on the wall in plastic bags or are filed in plastic bags in a container. Children choose their own stories and tapes from the selection provided and read the stories as they listen to them on tape. Sometimes an activity accompanies a book.

Metal **Cabinets** provide storage for the teacher and can be used for magnetic letters. Here, children write messages or practice making words and word families. The **Shelves** are more storage for the teacher, and the **Teacher's Desk** provides a place for the teacher to plan.

Computers function as a center for the children who monitor their own use of the computers and teach each other how to use them. A printer helps for story writing.

The **Home Center** becomes a sociodramatic play area during center time. It contains a stove, refrigerator, sink, phone, table, and chairs, and includes a rocking chair. Dolls and a doll crib as well as grocery items from the children's homes are displayed. Books about making birthday cakes and patterned books are good additions to the center. Paper and pencils are available.

Children use the **Large Table** for table block constructions and to create projects. On the **Large Floor Area**, children use floor blocks, Lego®, floor puzzles, or they meet in small groups for discussion and planning.

The **Art Center** consists of a round table, sink, supplies on shelves, and an easel for painting. Children complete specific projects or create their own here.

**Math Shelves** at the **Math Center** contain bins with manipulatives to be used as portable centers on the open table areas. The **Science Center** also contains equipment that may be used for specific science investigations. Children may work at the science center desk or at the open tables.

At the **Flannelboards**, children retell stories and invent their own. Flannelgraph numbers are also available for play and computation. The **Letters Center** includes letter games, letter puzzles, and letter sand trays to encourage children to play and use letters. A Letters Center is especially useful for younger children.

The **Poetry Center** includes a hanging rack with poetry posters used in class during Shared Poem. At the Poetry Center, children read the familiar poems and then create their own poetry books.

A **Library** is a necessity in the multi-age classroom. It should include a good selection of literature that children use during centers as well as for independent reading. Be sure to provide a variety of reading genres as well as reading levels.

The **Stage** area is simply a wall dressed with colorful paper and hanging sheets (to frame the stage). Here, children act out stories and poems and conduct Readers Theater. A puppet theater stands near the stage.

In the center of the classroom are several **Tables**. These tables are used for many purposes. Children might write in their journals here after a large-group Modeled Writing. Small groups can work at the tables, and they are good for portable centers. Overflow from centers in the classroom can be accommodated by the tables.

Children make books and write stories in the **Writing Center**. Book models, felt pens, paper and dictionaries supply this table.

The **Printing Center** contains wooden printing letters and print pads for children to play with and print messages. They can also make thumbprint creatures and write stories about them.

The **Supplies Table** contains various classroom supplies, open and available for the children to use. Children's portfolios and center folders are also housed on this large table.

This multi-age environment allows children to move freely from center to center. Children have opportunities to work in small, cooperative groups; large groups; or simply by themselves. The classroom has large areas, small areas, and even little nooks and crannies. This environment encourages active learning.

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# LEARNING CENTERS

Learning centers can provide children with opportunities for open-ended, hands-on experiences in which they practice a variety of skills and concepts. As you begin to think about the space that you have for centers, you should keep the following points in mind:

1. As children use these centers, they are learning to research. The process of problem solving and the use of tools takes priority over "correct answers" and "products."
2. The centers should provide open-ended experiences that vary in difficulty and complexity.
3. During the center time, the teacher needs to be able to see all the children.
4. The themes and projects in the centers should be relevant and meaningful to the children. Children should be encouraged to assist in the planning and organization of centers.
5. Centers should address the multiple learning styles of children and allow for multiple ways for children to represent their learning.
6. The materials should be stored in the center. Children should have access to and be able to get any materials they need. If using tables, the teacher can label boxes and put them underneath the tables. Clean-up is the responsibility of the children who participate in the center. Storage areas should be clearly marked to assist the children in putting away all materials for easy clean-up.
7. While children are working in the centers, the teacher needs to circulate, assist, observe, and assess the children in their learning.
8. After center time, it is important for children to have the opportunity to share what they have been exploring. They may wish to share a discovery they made at the science table, a picture drawn in the art center, or a building constructed in the block area.
9. The whole class should have a discussion about the correct and safe use of the various materials in each center. The teacher and the students should develop the ground rules for each center.
10. In designing the centers, it is important to avoid creating or reinforcing gender stereotypes through the selection of materials or organization.
11. It is important that the teacher posts above each of the centers the educational goals and objectives. This is helpful for parents, student teachers, administrators, volunteers, and visitors.

**You will note on the following pages of the guide some educational goals, observable skills, and a few of the Indiana Academic Standards these centers can address.** You will also find some suggested materials for various learning centers. These lists are not complete but offer ideas for the kinds of materials that might be included. Teachers obtain materials from various sources outside of school material funds, including parents and businesses. In this section, there are also sample letters in which teachers ask for parents' assistance in obtaining needed materials.

# THE ART AREA

In the *ART AREA*, we paint, color, draw, design, plan, and create while we

. . . learn color identification.
. . . learn about space and distance.
. . . explore texture and dimension.
. . . experiment with mixing and combining.
. . . develop creativity and individuality.
. . . *explore a variety of media.* *
. . . *identify and use different media and processes to effectively express ideas and feelings.* **
. . . *observe and describe objects carefully to learn about them.* ***

* Kindergarten performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, Visual Arts.
** Grade 1 performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, Visual Arts.
*** Grade 1 performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, Science.

**SUGGESTED MATERIALS**

Clay, play dough, and tools
Easels and paint: tempera, water color, finger
Scissors
Glue, glue sticks
Crayons, markers, colored pencils, pencils
Yarn, string
Paper: construction, newsprint, manila, finger paint paper, tissue, crepe, wallpaper, etc.
Fabric scraps and buttons, etc.
Magazines, catalogs,
Cardboard and oaktag

Stamps and stamp pads

## THE BLOCK AREA

In the ***BLOCK AREA*** we

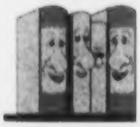
. . . learn about balance and symmetry.
. . . explore shape, size, height, and weight.
. . . measure and record.
. . . work with others and communicate ideas.
. . . use problem solving strategies.
. . . develop pride and sense of accomplishment.
. . . *arrange and describe objects in space by position and direction: near, far, below, above, up, down, behind, in front of, next to, left or right of.**
. . . *assemble, describe, take apart, reassemble constructions using interlocking blocks, erector sets, and the like.***
. . . *build squares, rectangles, triangles, cubes, and rectangular prisms with blocks.****

* Grade 1 performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, Mathematics
** Grade 2 performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, Science.
*** Grade 2 performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, Mathematics

**SUGGESTED MATERIALS**

Wooden blocks, boards
Interlocking blocks
Erector sets
Signs
Block play props: multiethnic vehicles, toy animals, people, etc.
Large empty boxes, cardboard tubes, etc.
Paper, pencils, markers, oaktag board, etc.
Rug

# THE CLASSROOM LIBRARY AREA



In the ***CLASSROOM LIBRARY AREA*** we

. . . read to ourselves and each other.
. . . use computers and other technology to research areas of interest.
. . . learn about story structure.
. . . develop independence through checking books out ourselves.
. . . get ideas for writing our own stories.
. . . get our parents to read to us when we take these books home.
. . . learn that reading has a purpose and it is fun!
. . . *raise questions about the natural world.* *
. . . *determine what characters are like by what they say or do and by how the author or illustrator portrays them.* **

* Kindergarten performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, Science.
** Grade 3 performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, English/Language Arts.

**SUGGESTED MATERIALS**

Books: fiction, non-fiction, picture, predictable, etc.
Multicultural resources: books, newsprint, audio and video materials, etc.
Books and resources in different languages
Books made by children
Magazines, newspapers
Computer and printer
Audio tapes, video tapes, and CD's
Comfortable seating area: bean bags, rug, rockers, tub, etc.
Big books
Shelves, storage baskets, tubs, etc.
TV/VCR

# THE DRAMATIC PLAY AREA

In the ***DRAMATIC PLAY AREA*** we

. . . learn about the roles of different people around us.
. . . practice everyday life skills like setting the table & washing dishes.
. . . learn about cooperation and compromise.
. . . learn oral language skills.
. . . solve real world mathematical and language problems.
. . . develop observation and application skills.
. . . *play and present dramatic interpretations of experiences, stories, poems, or plays.* *
. . . *create music to go with readings or plays. Use several sound sources when composing.* **

* Grade 3 performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, English/Language Arts.

** Kindergarten performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, Music.

**SUGGESTED MATERIALS**

Table and chairs
Occupational props: doctor's kit, cash register, play money, kitchen and household supplies, etc.
Dress-up clothes: uniforms, multiethnic clothing, shoes, hats, etc.
Multiethnic dolls and clothes
Telephone
Paper, pencil, markers, oaktag, etc.
Calculator, adding machine, etc.
Rhythm and musical instrument
Scarves and dance props
Full-length mirror

# THE MANIPULATIVE AREA

In the ***MANIPULATIVE AREA*** we

. . . put together puzzles.
. . . develop our small muscles.
. . . learn about letters and numbers.
. . . categorize.
. . . learn about patterns.
. . . sequence.
. . . sort.
. . . design.
. . . develop problem solving strategies and logical thinking skills.
. . . *show equivalent fractions using equal parts.* *
. . . *use shapes, such as circles, squares, and triangles, to describe different objects.* **

* Grade 3 performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, Mathematics.
** Kindergarten performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, Science.

**SUGGESTED MATERIALS**

Math manipulatives: Pattern blocks, tangrams, geoboards, interlocking cubes, attribute blocks, etc.
Base ten blocks
Puzzles
Games
Counters: chips, beans, etc.
Objects for sorting, classifying, and ordering
Food and/or other items to develop fraction concepts

# THE MATH AND SCIENCE AREA

In the ***MATH AND SCIENCE AREA*** we

. . . discover.
. . . predict.
. . . explore and experiment.
. . . solve problems.
. . . learn about numbers and their relationships.
. . . learn about weights and balance.
. . . observe and care for classroom pets.
. . . organize and record.
. . . *recognize and describe that much can be learned about plants and animals by observing them closely, but care must be taken to know the needs of living things and how to provide for them in the classroom.**
. . . *record numerical data in systematic ways, keeping track of what has been counted.***
. . . *measure and estimate length to the nearest inch, foot, yard, centimeter, and meter.***

* Grade 1 performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, Science.
** Grade 2 performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, Mathematics.

## SUGGESTED MATERIALS

Collections: rocks, shells, insects, etc.
Magnifying glasses and prisms
Magnets
Various manipulatives
Electronic items: batteries, wires, bells, etc.
Measuring equipment: rulers, scales, thermometers, etc.
Old appliances and tools
Animals and cages
Simple machines: pulleys, gears, etc.
Beakers, tubes, liquid measuring devices, etc.
Plants
Paper, pencils, markers, graph paper, etc.
Access to computer and printer

# THE SAND AREA

In the ***SAND AREA*** we

. . . learn about cooperation and sharing space.
. . . exchange ideas and learn from others.
. . . explore concepts of shape, size, texture, and space.
. . . develop oral language skills.
. . . develop eye-hand coordination.
. . . learn responsibility for cleaning up after ourselves.
. . . *speak clearly and at an appropriate pace for the type of communication.* *
. . . *observe and describe how measurements are likely to be slightly different, even if what is being measured stays the same.* **

* Grade 2 performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, English/Language Arts.
** Grade 3 performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, Science.

## SUGGESTED MATERIALS

Sand table
Accessories: sifters, shovels, pails, rakes, molds, funnels, measuring cups, etc.
Rice, beans, and oatmeal to vary sand play
Garden tools/ supplies

# $H_2O$ THE WATER EXPERIMENT AREA

In the ***WATER EXPERIMENT AREA*** we

. . . learn about pressure and force.
. . . develop an understanding of sink and float.
. . . discover laws of conservation.
. . . learn about states of matter.
. . . develop eye-hand coordination.
. . . learn about distance and accuracy through pouring, dumping, and squeezing.
. . . *recognize and explain water can be a liquid or a solid and can go back and forth from one to the other.* *
. . . *observe and describe that water left in an open container disappears, but water in a closed container does not disappear.* *
. . . *estimate capacity using cups and pints.* **

* Grade 1 performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, Science.
** Grade 2 performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, Mathematics.

## SUGGESTED MATERIALS

Water tub
Plastic tubing
Ice cube tray
Small pitchers
Hand pumps
Spray bottles
Funnels
Measuring cups
Eye droppers
Food coloring
Water wheel

# THE WOODWORKING AREA

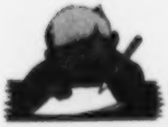
In the ***WOODWORKING AREA*** we

. . . develop eye-hand coordination.
. . . learn about balance.
. . . represent what we know about our world.
. . . take pride in our workmanship.
. . . learn about shape and size.
. . . practice and understand the functions of measurement.
. . . develop creative expression.
. . . *use hammers, screwdrivers, clamps, rulers, scissors, and hand lenses, and operate appropriate electronic equipment.* *
. . . *use tools to observe, measure, and make things.* **
. . . *measure the length of objects by repeating a non-standard or standard unit.* ***

* Grade 3 performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, Science.
** Grade 2 performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, Science.
*** Grade 1 performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, Mathematics.

**SUGGESTED MATERIALS**

Workbench
Tools: hammer, saw, vice, clamp, hand drill, ruler, screwdrivers, pliers, etc.
Wood and dowels
Styrofoam, PVC pipe, etc.
Nails
Goggles
Measuring equipment, rulers



# THE WRITING AREA

In the ***WRITING AREA*** we

. . . write stories, messages, labels, charts, music, and poems.
. . . have a chance to express our thoughts in creative ways.
. . . use inventive (or phonetic) spellings as we learn to transfer speech sounds into written language.
. . . connect reading and writing.
. . . use models of conventional written language to help us with our own writing.
. . . believe in ourselves as writers as we write for real purposes.
. . . *draw pictures and write words for a specific reason.* *
. . . *write, for different purposes and to specific audience or purpose.* **
. . . *keep and report records of investigations and observations.* ***

* Kindergarten performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, English/Language Arts.
** Grade 1 performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, English/Language Arts
*** Grade 3 performance standard from the Indiana Academic Standards 2000, Science.

**SUGGESTED MATERIALS**

Crayons, pens, pencils, markers, etc.
Different kinds of paper: stationery, notebook, postcards, unlined, chart paper, index cards, etc.
Blank books
Transparencies and markers
Envelopes
Computer and printer
Dictionary and Thesaurus
Letter stamps
Overhead projector

# INVITING HELP FROM PARENTS FOR DRAMATIC PLAY

Dear Parents,

One of my goals for this school year is to increase the opportunities and materials for sociodramatic play. Research supports sociodramatic play as one of the most important forms of play because it involves the use of such skills as symbolic representation, perspective taking, precise use of language, cooperation, and sharing.

I have begun a collection of "character boxes" for the children's use in our housekeeping center. Each box contains come clothing, accessories, and props for creating an individual character. For example, the farmer box includes overalls, a flannel shirt, a straw hat, and a bandanna.

I need your help in completing the remaining characters. Please review the character list and return the bottom portion, indicating what character you and your child would be willing to work on and donate to our classroom. You can find items at home (clean those closets!) or ask a neighbor or look at a secondhand store. I would appreciate it if you could work with your child to complete a single character; however, if you discover an item that would fit another character, please also send it in.

Thank you for your support of this project that will benefit your children. I'm looking forward to a wonderful year.

**Character List**

artist
bride/groom
business person
cheerleader
chef
circus performer
construction worker
cowboy/cowgirl
doctor
firefighter
grocery clerk
hairdresser
judge/lawyer
mechanic
mountain climber
musician
painter
pilot
police officer
postal worker
prince/princess
teacher
waitress/waiter
zookeeper

Or, name any other character you can think of!

Sincerely,

Child's Name ______________________________

Parent's Name ______________________________

Character we will be willing to complete for a character box:

______________________________

Specific items we can donate for another character:

______________________________

(Courtesy of Kim Huff and Kim Rimbey, Washington School District, Phoenix, Arizona)
( From "Wanted: Advocates for Play in the Primary Grades" *Young Children*, September, 1995. Reprinted with permission from NAEYC.)

# INVOLVING PARENTS IN CREATING PROP BOXES

Dear Parents,

One of my goals for this school year is to increase the opportunities and materials for sociodramatic play of stories in literature. Research supports sociodramatic play as one of the most important forms of play because it involves the use of such skills as symbolic representation, perspective taking, precise use of language, cooperation, and sharing. Research has also shown that acting out stories helps children improve their comprehension abilities as well as story-element understanding.

I have begun a collection of "prop boxes" that will be placed in the play stage in our classroom. Each box contains some clothing, accessories, and props for a specific story we will be reading this year. For example, the "Henny Penny" prop box contains an acorn, umbrella, hat, stool, and a few clothing items for each character.

I need your help in completing the remaining prop boxes. Please review the story list below and return the bottom portion of this letter, indicating which story you and your child would be willing to work on and find props for to bring to our classroom. Items are often found at home, from a neighbor, or at a secondhand store. I would appreciate it if you could work with your child to complete a story; however, if you have an item that would fit another story, please send it in.

Thank you for your support of this project that will benefit your children. I'm looking forward to a wonderful year.

**Story list**

"Stone Soup"
"The Gingerbread Boy"
"Jack and the Beanstalk"
"The Little Red Hen"
"The Elves and the Shoemaker"
"The Hare and the Tortoise"
"Little Red Riding Hood"
"The City Mouse and the Country Mouse"
"The Lion and the Mouse"
"Cinderella"
*Where the Wild Things Are*
Sylvester and the Magic Pebble
*There's a Nightmare in My Closet*
"The Three Bears"
"The Three Little Pigs"
"Henny Penny"

Please decide on which story you would like to work. Write down your first and second choices on the bottom portion of this page, tear it off, and return it as soon as possible. I will send a list of possible items that you may want to include in your prop box as well as a bag for putting everything into. Thanks so much for your help!

Sincerely,

— — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

Child's Name ________________________________________

Parent's Name ________________________________________

___ I would like to put together the following prop box:

First Choice ____________________ Second Choice ____________________

___ I would like to put together a prop box that is not on this list.

Title ________________________________________

___ I cannot help at this time. Ask me again another time.

(Courtesy of Kim Huff and Kim Rimbey, Washington School District, Phoenix Arizona.)
(From "Wanted: Advocates for Play in the Primary Grades" *Young Children*, September, 1995. Reprinted by permission from NAEYC.)

# early years are learning years

## Block play: building a child's mind

Unit blocks may not be as sophisticated as some toys we find in stores or on TV commercials, but they are ideal for learning because they involve the child as a whole—the way she moves her muscles, the way she discovers how different objects feel in her hands, the way she thinks about spaces and shapes, and the way she develops thoughts and interests of her own.

Unit blocks vary in name and material by manufacturer, but they are all based on the proportions 1:2:4. These blocks must be sturdy and accurately cut so that children of all different ages and levels of learning may use them to create, solve problems, and challenge themselves.

### TOYS THAT GROW WITH YOUR CHILD

Unit blocks are a good investment because children may continue to use them as they grow. Infants and toddlers enjoy simply touching and gripping larger, textured blocks. As toddlers, they develop more muscle control and are able to combine blocks, stack them, or line them up. Two-year-olds may demonstrate their first attempts at building structures, and show the beginnings of fantasy play.

Around the age of three, children learn how to balance and fit pieces together to build sturdier towers, then bridges and enclosures. Threes and fours begin to recognize designs and patterns, their towers and buildings becoming works of art. In kindergarten and early primary grades, blocks allow children to recreate structures, cities and landscapes from everyday life.

### BLOCKS HELP CHILDREN LEARN

**Socially**—Blocks encourage children to make friends and cooperate. Large block play may be a young child's first experience playing in a group, while small block play may encourage an older child to work with others in solving problems.

**Physically**—When children reach for, pick up, stack, or fit blocks together, they build strength in their fingers and hands, and increase eye-hand coordination. Around two, children begin to figure out which shapes will fit where, and get a head start on understanding different perspectives—skills that will help them to read maps and follow directions later on. Blocks help kindergarten and primary grade children develop skills in design, representation, balance and stability.

**Intellectually**—Blocks help children learn across many academic subjects. Young children develop their vocabularies as they learn to describe sizes, shapes, and positions. Preschoolers and kindergartners develop math skills by grouping, adding, subtracting and eventually multiplying with blocks. Older children make early experiments with gravity, balance, and geometry.

**Creatively**—Blocks offer children the chance to make their own designs, and the satisfaction of creating structures that did not exist before. Beginning at the age of two, children may use a variety of blocks for pretend-play. Children may become life-sized actors in large block structures, or use figures to create dramas in miniature landscapes.

Children value their own block structures whether or not they represent specific things. Rather than asking a child, "What did you make?" say, "Tell me about what you made." This will encourage a dialog and offer the child new opportunities to explore.

### BLOCKS IN THE CLASSROOM

Ideally, the block area in a classroom should be three-sided, appropriate for noisy activity, out of the way of other classroom traffic, and big enough for many children to work in at once. Create safe places for block structures to remain standing so that children may go back and continue building at a later time.

Shelves at children's eye-level can be used to store blocks and provide space for other activities. Blocks should be organized neatly so that children are invited to use them independently and be capable of cleaning up on their own.

Block play is open-ended, and its possibilities are limitless. Even as children grow and develop new interests and abilities, blocks remain an active, creative learning tool.

**Additional resources:**

Hirsch, E.S. 1996. *The Block Book*. (Third Ed.) Washington, DC: NAEYC. #1321$5.

NAEYC. 1993. Block Play: Constructing Realities (video). Washington, DC: NAEYC.#838/$39.

Release #97/4

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202-232-8777, 800-424-2460, FAX: 202-328-1846 Web: http://www.naeyc.org/naeyc

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# early years are learning years

## Water play: A key to children's living-learning environment

When it comes to play materials, children don't mind getting messy or wet. That's why water play is both enjoyable and educational—and perfect for hot days that call for cooling off. Indoor water play can go on all year long, and like outdoor play, helps children develop eye-hand coordination and math and science concepts. It may also enhance social skills and encourage cooperation. There is no right or wrong way to play with this familiar, inexpensive "toy" that comes not from a package, but from our very own environment.

Whether it be toddlers or school-agers, there are safety factors to consider when playing outdoors. Adults should monitor children carefully to prevent slipping or overexposure to the sun. As with all outdoor activities, be prepared for bee stings and knee scrapes. Indoors or outdoors, any container of water is a possible hazard and must be supervised at all times.

Water tables, while great opportunities for children to compromise and work together, must be carefully maintained to prevent germs that can grow in warm and wet environments. If teachers keep water tables, they must be sure the tables are cleaned and disinfected with bleach solution and filled with fresh water at least daily. Children should wash their hands before playing at the table, and toys should be washed and disinfected daily. Many teachers prefer large plastic tubs for individual children, sometimes set within an empty table that catches spillover. These can be disinfected more easily, and make clean-up quicker and easier.

Adults should look for cues in children's water play for opportunities to stimulate fantasy play. Add objects from home, school and nature. Pose open-ended questions, make sure children have challenging and interesting options, and give them the opportunity to evaluate and tell others about what they did and learned through play.

If a child makes a boat out of a squeeze bottle, we may be prompted to join in their pretend-play. But, use judgement in choosing when to step in and ask questions and when to stand back, listen, and enjoy. Fantasy play is an important—and sometimes private—part of children's development. Don't be discouraged if caregivers aren't invited to participate every time.

**Here are some ideas for waterplay:**

- Individual water tubs at a table make great activity centers. Begin with water only, then add playthings as children's interest wanes. Begin with spoons and shovels, then move on to sponges and measuring tools. Sand and shells are great for children to touch and explore.

- Children will love to "paint" water on outdoor pavement with buckets and paint brushes. Older children may paint the letters of their names. Younger children will be content making back-and-forth strokes. Either way, a few minutes in sunlight, and watch it evaporate!

- Squeeze bottles of water offer a variety of play opportunities, and help children develop eye-hand coordination. Children may look for the best way to squirt long or short distances. Or, they may create designs on the water's surface.

- Assorted containers, funnels, and plastic tubes will help children learn to measure, and are key for the early development of math and science skills. Curiosity leads to experimentation: Which objects will float? Which ones hold the most liquid? Gradually, children build their vocabularies (empty/full, shallow/deep) and learn how to categorize.

Water play helps children understand and enjoy their living-learning environment. If parents and caregivers become comfortable with water as a tool for young children's education, more ideas for learning through this natural medium will surface.

**Additional Resources:**

Crosser, S. 1994. Making the most of water play. *Young Children* 49(5).

Hill, D.M. 1977. *Mud, sand, and water.* Washington, DC: NAEYC. #308/$3.

Planje, A.C. 1997. Playing with water in primary ways. *Young Children* 52(2).

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# SUGAR WAS HER NAME

Marlane Tisdale
MSD Warren Township, Indianapolis

Teacher Story

Sugar was a beautiful white rabbit with sparkling pink eyes that made her home in my classroom for 10 years. Every morning the kindergartners would let her out of her hutch to interact all day with the children. Every evening she would return to her hutch to rest and sleep until the next morning when out she came again to romp and play. On the weekends and on vacations, she would make her rounds visiting the families of the children. Sugar knew no stranger and loved resting on a child's lap while they were reading in the book nook or being gently clothed in doll clothes and pushed around the classroom in a stroller. They could trust her and in return she could trust them to feed her, be gentle to her, and give her a lot of love. She was truly a devoted friend to all!

As the facilitator of this classroom, I would constantly circulate throughout the room listening and assisting the children as they were busily engaged in their learnings. One day in particular as I circulated among these engaged children, I was observing Michael. He had been in kindergarten for 8 weeks and had **never** spoken to me or anyone of his peers. The children would ask me, "Can't Michael talk?" I reassured them that Michael would talk when he was ready to do so, and when he really felt at home in our room.

Michael was in the block corner building a house for Sugar. Sugar was resting nearby and watching the construction of the house. Michael was talking very softly to Sugar and saying, "I love you Sugar and that is why I am building you a house that will be safe for you to live in. I wish that you had a Mommy and Daddy that could live with you in the house. I don't have a Mommy or Daddy either—I live with my Auntie. I will get you a friend to live with." When Sugar's house was completed, Michael went over to the book nook and reached up on the shelf and got down a stuffed rabbit and took it over and put it in the block house! Sugar hopped over to investigate his new house and new friend and laid down and went to sleep. From that day forward, Michael continued to talk not only to Sugar, but to all his classmates and to the teachers.

Although many school districts discourage having animals in the classroom (warm blooded animals in particular), they can be a very valuable resource in the learning environment. The children learn to assume full responsibility in caring for the pets. They learn the proper way to handle the pets. They learn what the animals eat and the right amount to feed them. They also learn that, along with caring for the pets, they must keep their cages clean. In Michael's case, Sugar helped him overcome his shyness. From this experience, I gained an insight into Michael that I would not have had if Sugar had not been our pet.

Before I brought Sugar to school when she was just a few months old, I took her to the vet to have all the necessary shots, and each year she returned to the vet for her immunizations. I always placed her tags on her cage to assure the parents of the safety of having her in the room with the children.

One year, a child in the class had an extreme allergy. It was necessary for me to take Sugar to my house for the year; but this was an extreme case and that was the only year that this happened in the 10 years that Sugar lived in our room.

One evening in March, I came back to school to have conferences with parents. I turned the classroom light on as I always did and called out, "Sugar, Sugar!" She did not respond with her usual thump on the cage door. I looked over at the cage to find that she had died. I am convinced that she knew that was the year that I was retiring; so she decided that it was time for her to leave also.

Sugar is buried in the woods next to the playground at my school. The children made a marker for her grave at the workbench and also found a stepping stone on which they painted her name. Even though this story has a rather unhappy ending, this entire experience was extremely valuable for the children and one that they will never forget as they grow into adults.

When planning your learning environment, do not forget the value of adding pets to the classroom!

# PET CARE IN THE CLASSROOM

*Brian Seth Perler*

Pets in the classroom can be used to serve a multitude of educational purposes. Pets can help students learn about many things, including population growth, responsibility, food chains, and respect for the natural environment. Unfortunately, pets sometimes become unwanted classroom chores. This is usually due to a lack of understanding of the chosen pets. Consequently, they are sometimes neglected, and their quality of life is diminished. I have seen and heard many stories about people who "can't seem to keep fish alive" or who will try anoles, but they "just don't do well" for them. I have also seen many malnourished or otherwise unhealthy animals, from guinea pigs to iguanas. Many of these animals received help only after it was too late.

The purpose of this article is to list some animals that may be well suited for the classroom so the students can get the most out of the animals, and the animal can have the best possible captive life. In addition, some important information is included about the care of these animals. The suggestions included are from my own personal experiences. I have worked in pet stores for several years and have owned or have had significant experience with almost all of the animals mentioned. Keep in mind the information included only scratches the surface. Teachers need to be aware of local policies that may specify animals that are not allowed in classrooms. I have rated the animals with stars: 5 stars being the highest recommendation.

## SMALL ANIMALS

Guinea pigs (*****): Although they are usually skittish in the pet stores, guinea pigs calm down and become accustomed to handling within a couple of weeks. They almost never bite, and if they do, it is probably due to mishandling or severe teasing. They often choose a site to do their business; this area of the cage should be scooped out 2-3 times a week. Once a week, the bedding should be completely changed, and the cage should be cleaned and disinfected. I recommend pine for bedding. (Do not use cedar.) They should be housed in a cage that has a bottom no smaller than about 1 foot by 2 feet in area. The plastic bottom wire cages are easiest to use. I have seen many guinea pigs in rabbit cages with wire mesh bottoms. Guinea pigs do not like this, and it can be remedied by placing newspaper on top of the mesh, and then putting the bedding on the newspaper, or removing the wire bottom. Provided they are given plenty of food and a large water bottle, guinea pigs can be left unattended on the weekends (although I am sure they would rather go home with a student). Finally, be sure to trim the *tips* of their nails about once a month.

Rats (****): Rats can make great pets. They are easy to handle and require little maintenance. Although parents are not usually fond of them, they are smart, cuddly, and easy to handle.

Hamsters (****): They often bite if they are not handled enough but can be very loving. These are solitary animals. Therefore, an adult hamster should not get a "buddy." They are clean and nearly odorless; however, their cages still need to be cleaned out weekly.

Mice (***): Mice can be good pets. They do tend to smell though, and parents may not approve of them. They are, however, very smart and interesting creatures. Beware, they are pretty good at getting out of cages.

Gerbils (***): First of all, expect to lose them sometimes. They are very fast and can get out of many cages, especially plastic

ones. They really like to chew. I probably would not have them in a class any younger than third grade. However, they are easy to care for and are usually quite friendly.

Rabbits (**): Although they can make excellent pets, I find that they are often acquired because of how cute they are and with little knowledge about their requirements or their tendencies toward eating their poop and scratching people. (In addition, rabbits can carry with them an unpleasant odor.) Often, if a child handles a rabbit without knowing how to properly hold it, the rabbit will search for stability by kicking its very powerful hind legs. The end result can easily be a child in a lot of pain, with some very long and deep scratches from the nails. Rabbits generally need to be housed in a large hutch.

Hedge hogs (*): I find that these often become neglected after the initial thrill wears off. For this reason, I do not recommend them very highly, unless you get a pair of them or are certain it will be given enough attention. They are difficult to care for in that they're omnivores that require an extensive, diverse diet, which includes live food. In some communities, hedge hogs are illegal to own or sell. You will want to check local ordinances.

Chinchillas (*): These can be pretty good household pets, but they are a bit tricky to handle properly. (As a matter of fact, it is not difficult to pull their tails off.) They are also escape artists, can bite, and need dust baths occasionally.

Ferrets: I would never recommend a ferret for a classroom. They can bite, and they can be very destructive. They need a large cage and have a fairly pungent odor.

Never use cedar for small animal bedding for it can cause respiratory infections. The oil that cedar releases is a common allergen for pets. Pine shavings, recycled paper bedding, or others are much safer, and the difference in price is minimal. Often, people like cedar because it covers up odors better. However, if you are using something other than cedar and smell the animal, that is a good indication that the animal's environment needs to be cleaned.

## BIRDS

Birds (**): I do not usually recommend birds for the classroom, but I have seen it work. I would recommend getting one in the home before trying it in the class. They can be very messy and normally require a lot of attention. Also, call a bird veterinarian to ask advice on selecting the right type for your class. Finches, parakeets, or cockatiels are some of the best choices.

## REPTILES, AMPHIBIANS AND ARACHNIDS

**Note: Salmonella can be transmitted by reptiles, so hand washing with antibacterial soap is absolutely imperative. Also check local policies to see if reptiles are permitted.**

Frogs (****): Provided they are housed in the proper environment, frogs can be wonderful pets. Beware of the potential size of the species you choose. I have seen many grow very large, and often they remain housed in enclosures that are too small. Remember to wash hands.

Lizards (****): Some types can be great, and some can be disastrous. Do a lot of research and check out size potential. Iguanas get to be about 5 feet long. I would recommend collared lizards, anoles, and many species of skinks. Remember to wash hands!

Turtles (***): I do not recommend aquatic turtles for the classroom (they require a lot of space and maintenance), but box turtles can be excellent classroom pets. Please make sure that the species you select is not on the endangered list. Salmonella can be transmitted by turtles, so hand washing with antibacterial soap is absolutely imperative. Also check local policies to see if turtles are permitted.

Snakes (***): Some species can make excellent classroom pets. The slower the better. Ribbon snakes and garters, though fast, are harmless and small (but are good at finding ways out of cages). Ball pythons can be a good choice for a larger snake if you do a lot of research first. This is a small species of python that tend to be slow and gentle. Snakes can bite. I would recommend feeding them dead rodents to reduce the chance that they will ever strike. Purchasing snakes as young as possible and handling them often help them remain tame.

Arachnids (tarantulas, scorpions, etc..)(***): These can be great for educational purposes, but make sure you have a locked cage. Parents may be able to build you one. In most cases, you will not want to handle them with the children. However, they can still have a good captive life. They do not get "lonely"!

When feeding crickets to reptiles or amphibians, it is best to feed a little bit daily instead of dumping the whole bag in and waiting another week to feed them. A jar with holes in the lid and a piece of potato on the bottom is a good way to house crickets until they are needed.

## FISH

Goldfish (*****): Goldfish make great pets. They are easy to care for, tolerant of varied conditions, and are long lived. If they are in a bowl with no filtration, remove the "clean" top half of the water and put it in a bucket. Now put the fish in this water. Discard the water that remains in the bowl and rinse out the bowl and gravel. It only needs a light rinsing. You will need to do water changes every other day, for they are very dirty. Do not overstock your tank. There should be no more than 1 inch of fish per gallon of water maximum. It is best to have a 10 gallon or larger fish tank with a filter. (See the paragraph below African Cichlids for tank maintenance and information about the nitrogen cycle.)

Tropical fish (*****): These include freshwater fish such as mollies, tetras, barbs, angels, loaches, etc. Many interesting behaviors can be studied with these fish. Fish magazines are excellent resources. Try not to buy these fish on a whim or just because they are pretty. Take your time to research them, and remember that fish that are not as colorful are often equally interesting. Fish often die in new tanks. If you experience this, do not "clean the whole tank." Read up on the 4-6 week nitrogen cycle! (There is some information about this below.) And remember not to overstock. These fish need a 10 gallon or larger tank with filtration and a heater.

African Cichlids (****): These fish are higher maintenance and require that you do more research before you begin. However, the rewards are great. They are extremely interesting, and you can use them to teach about a wide variety of topics including territories, nutrition, and ecosystems. They require many hiding places and prefer fine gravel. It will be more expensive to get started with these fish.

For tank maintenance, you generally need to siphon the gravel and about 20% of the water from the tank twice a month and replace it with new water. Tap water is okay to use with freshwater fish as long as you use tap water conditioner (which you can get at a pet store). Carbon filters also need to be replaced monthly.

The nitrogen cycle is the most important process that takes place in a fish tank. Understanding this cycle is important for maintaining a successful aquarium. In this cycle, beneficial bacteria grow in the fish tank and decompose waste. For the first 4-6 weeks of a new tank, there are periods when the toxicity of the water is very high and some fish may die. Ironically, the worst thing you can do is to "clean out the whole tank." Periods of toxic levels in the water are just a necessary part of the nitrogen cycle. After this time period (usually 4-6 weeks), a tank is established, and provided you maintain the tank properly, you should have few problems with fish dying.

Saltwater fish (*): If you are interested in keeping these fish in a classroom, first take a year or so to learn about them at home. They are very expensive, and time consuming.

Always wash hands before and after handling any animals. I recommend using antibacterial soaps. This is especially important with turtles, lizards, amphibians, and the like. These animals can carry salmonella and other health risks.

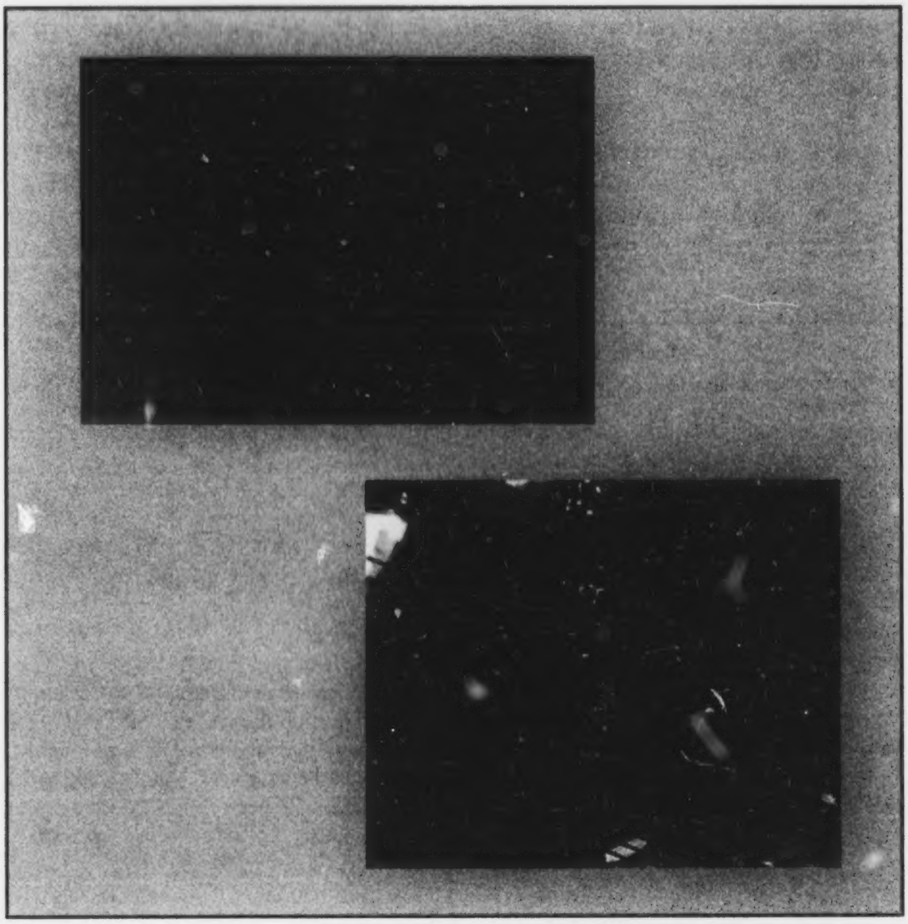
Beware of getting pairs of certain animals, especially rodents. They can breed quite rapidly and so can their offspring. Plan ahead if you intend to breed them.

When you cut animals' nails, be careful to only cut the tips. If you cut too far, you can cut the quick which will cause bleeding.

Pets can be expensive. Families will often donate pets or old pet supplies to the classroom. If you cannot find what you are looking for from parents, the local trading paper usually has many bargains. Please be careful who you buy it from, and be cautious about what you are buying from a stranger. Also, many pet stores have discounts for teachers. I strongly recommend purchasing any animal you intend to handle very young. When it comes to small animals, ask your retailer for a pet that has just been weaned.

These suggestions are not complete. It is important to do more research on animals you are considering. Some resources include books, pet stores, the Internet, and veterinarians. Having the class do research on the pros and cons of pets before they are purchased is also a good idea. It is also important that the children understand how to take care of the animals properly and that they are supervised. One benefit will be that the students will help feel more responsible for the pet chosen.

*Brian Seth Perler graduated from Indiana University, with a major in Elementary Education. He is currently teaching at a Navajo school in Arizona. He has been interested in pets since he can remember.*



# III. The Outdoor Environment

Beyond the walls of the classroom, there are many opportunities for the teacher to extend learning and involve children actively in their world. The outdoor environment should be, above all, an extension of the classroom. The outdoor environment is a learning environment, with play as a key element in learning.

The first goal of a good outdoor play area for children is to stimulate play in order to foster development and learning. A good play area develops healthy, resilient bodies and, at the same time, encourages children to act out the events that touch their lives. As with all areas of curriculum development, the outdoor environment design and use should be congruent with the children's level of social, cognitive, emotional, and physical development.

Good playground space provides a variety of challenges to the children. Outdoor space should be arranged and equipped to provide enriching experiences, rather than restricting ones. A minimum of 75 to 100 sq. ft. of play area per child is suggested. The covering of the outdoor space should include both grass for protection when falls occur, paved areas for wheeled toys, and protective surfaces under the large equipment. Trees are essential for shade and for helping to control sound. The entire play area should be well drained to allow for maximum use of the playground.

The maturity level of the children provides the criterion for selecting appropriate materials and supplies. Children need experiences in running, jumping, climbing, and other large motor activities. There must be enough equipment so that all children using the playground may find an activity. The playground should contain a few pieces of equipment that the children will find somewhat difficult at the beginning of the school year. As the children mature, they continue to use this equipment but in a different manner. As schools plan for their playgrounds, it is necessary that they provide equipment suitable for children with special needs.

In a *Scholastic Early Childhood Today* interview (1994), author Joe Frost says that there are seven features of an ideal outdoor play area for children:

1. Superstructure, or fixture that consists of different features such as decks with steps, slides, clatter bridges, ramps, and climbers. An excellent superstructure is made so it can be modified to accommodate changing needs.
2. A swing set, which may be attached to the superstructure or freestanding in an out-of-the-way area.
3. A safe surface under all equipment such as sand, pea gravel, bark mulch, or rubber matting. Sand is especially good because it doubles as a favorite play material.
4. A storage area for a wide variety of play supplies that children can use outdoors, including gross-motor toys such as tricycles and wagons, and also materials for creative, dramatic, and constructive play.
5. A dramatic play feature such as a play house, car, or boat. These can be permanent, commercially purchased structures, or portable ones made from boxes. Some schools even offer real cars or boats, stripped and prepared for safe play.
6. A wheeled vehicle track for pedaling tricycles and other riding toys. The track can serve as a link to all the other areas, starting at the storage shed and leading riders past attractive natural areas and to the superstructure and dramatic-play feature, which can become a pretend gas station or garage.
7. Some natural areas including flat, grassy areas for running or child organized games, hills and mounds for challenge and excitement, trees and shrubs for shade and beauty, and perhaps gardens and animal habitats for expanded play and learning.

Playground safety is a primary concern for the children when they are in the outdoor environment. Mr. Frost offers some suggestions upon steps to take to insure safety for the children:

1. Consult the experts. Check the playground setup against the guidelines in the Handbook for Public Playground Safety, published in 1991 by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. If any features on the playground are not safe, talk with the school supervisor. Obtain a free copy of the handbook by calling (301-504-0580) or writing to Handbook for Public Playground Safety, Consumer Product Safety Commission, Washington, D.C. 20207.
2. Follow the program's safety procedures. Playgrounds need to be checked and maintained on a daily basis. Make sure that the playground undergoes thorough inspections periodically. Be sure you know the proper procedures if a child is injured.
3. Involve the children in safety. Make sure that they are aware of safety rules and the reasons behind them. At a time that's not your usual outdoor play time, take a walk around the playground and discuss the greatest risks—throwing sand or gravel, climbing to the top of the rails and bars, jumping off the swings, walking in front of the swings, etc. Ask the children to demonstrate safe ways to use the equipment.
4. Keep play challenging. When children easily master all the activities available outdoors, they are more likely to use equipment in unsafe ways. When you provide a variety of activities, you make sure children have plenty of safe challenges: physical, social, emotional, and cognitive.

The teacher needs to be attuned to the individual needs of the children in the outdoor environment. Sometimes children are left out, and the teacher needs to look for ways to help these children become leaders of occasional outdoor activities. Hesitant children, who tend to shy away from physical activities, may need assistance and encouragement to help get them involved. Example: "Let's all use the balance beam." "Do you want to try Sally?" A teacher can offer to hold the child's hand as she tries to cross the beam.

The teacher also needs to help children set limits. Outdoor play can be difficult for children who have had a hard time setting their own limits. A teacher can talk with children individually about rules just before outdoor play begins and quietly remind them, when necessary, on the playground. The rules of the classroom community should be extended to the outdoor environment. When playground conflicts do arise, the teacher can help children resolve these conflicts. On the playground, these conflicts can easily escalate. Most playground conflicts are simple and can actually be beneficial. They help children learn to negotiate, understand social rules, and sharpen and clarify their own views. When conflict arises, the teacher must decide if intervening is necessary. This depends on just how serious the disagreement is. If children are physically fighting or using hurtful language, the teacher must step in but may let them negotiate minor disagreements by themselves. When the teacher does intervene, she should avoid deciding who is "right" or imposing a solution; and, instead, help the children put the situation into words.

The teacher should also help children negotiate games. Many times it is difficult for children to follow rules and to play in large groups. They like to organize their own games. When conflict arises, a teacher can call over the children involved and help them work out a solution. Group time is also an excellent time to discuss recurrent problems that happen on the playground. Before going outside, the class can discuss a current situation. "How can we make sure everyone has a good time at outdoor play?" The children need to be encouraged to talk about their problems and brainstorm possible solutions.

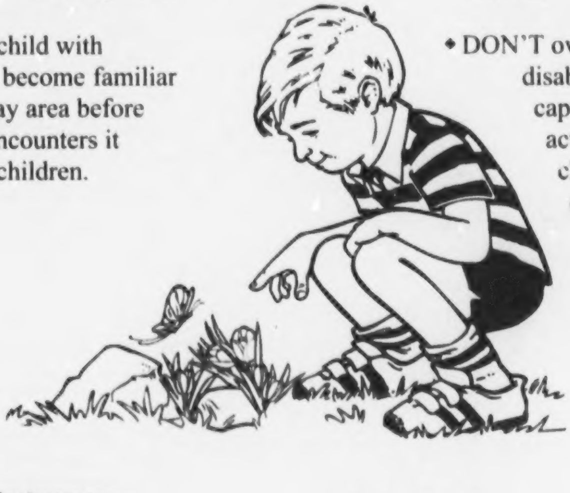
Teachers need to provide outdoor play in their schedule each day. Unless it is raining hard or the temperature is severe, children need outdoor play, even if it is just for a short time. This time provides a unique setting in which the teacher can observe the children's learning. Many opportunities are provided for the teacher to note and to document their growth, their developing skills, their individual interests, and their functioning as a group.

## SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN IN THE OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENT

Children with special needs benefit from a wide variety of outdoor activities that help in the development of gross and small motor skills. The outdoor environment also assists in cognitive, language, social, and emotional growth and provides multiple opportunities for these children to interact with others and gain in self-esteem. Children with special needs may need more encouragement and reinforcement than the other children in order to get the most of our play situations.

Dr. Merele Karnes, Ed.D. (1994), in *Early Childhood Today,* suggests the following DO'S and DON'T'S to keep in mind:

- DO talk with children's therapists about the arrangement of your play area to ensure that it is appropriate and safe for each child and to give children with disabilities the best chance for positive play experiences. For children with physical disabilities, find out which activities and kinds of equipment will benefit each child and which may be harmful.
- DO provide a variety of play materials so children can make choices based on their levels of development.
- DO help a child with disabilities become familiar with the play area before he or she encounters it with other children. Children with visual disabilities need to be oriented to the layout of the play area and the characteristics of each piece of equipment. Children with physical disabilities and with mental retardation will feel more confident using equipment when they have chances to try it out ahead of time.
- DO make sure that children with disabilities understand outdoor safety rules. Children with hearing disabilities or mental retardation, in particular, might need help.
- DO encourage all children to take part in large motor activities. Most children with disabilities can take part in regular outdoor games of running, jumping, climbing, and sliding.
- DO observe each child with a disability. Suggest and encourage activities that match his interests and stage of development.
- DON'T expect all children with disabilities to engage in play spontaneously. Offer ideas and guidance as needed. Children with mental retardation or physical disabilities, in particular, may need more structured, teacher-assisted activities.
- DO make sure children with disabilities play close to others so they can observe and interact with them to the best of their abilities.
- DON'T overprotect children with disabilities. Assume that they are capable people who can take an active part in outdoor play. If a child becomes involved in a conflict, help him learn acceptable ways to work it out, rather than stepping in to protect him.



# IV. Technology in the Early Childhood Classroom

## INCORPORATING TECHNOLOGY INTO THE CURRICULUM: ONE SCHOOL'S STORY

**Teacher Story**

*Linda L. Mills, Library Media Specialist*
*Greensburg Community Schools, Greensburg*

Several years ago, Rosenmund Elementary in Greensburg, Indiana, received a 4R's Grant to use technology in the kindergarten and first grade classrooms. At this time, the technology experiences were very limited in the building because only outdated machines were used. With the grant money, new computers were purchased. However, just because there is hardware, this does not mean that technology is going to be used.

The first grade teachers were open to using technology in their classrooms but didn't know how to incorporate the software into their classrooms. The first thing we did was examine the curriculum and decided that an animal unit could be done in conjunction with a science laser disk program we owned. A series of activities was planned around this curriculum area to incorporate technology as much as possible.

Introducing animals to the students came first. We told the students that each of them was going to become an expert on one particular animal of his/her choice. In the beginning, the students were not sure what an expert was, but they soon found out that it was quite exciting to be an expert! After the first year of letting the students choose whatever animal they wanted and ending up with lots of horses, dogs, and cats, we decided to guide them into their animals by a series of steps we implemented.

The first grade teachers talked about different animals using their laser disk science program. The media specialist then shared with students a book on mammals that was on a CD-ROM. We spent time looking at different and unusual animals and learning how to use a CD-ROM at the same time. Many CDs and books were left in the room for several days for students to examine. The teachers had the students write down three animals about which they could become experts. They explained to the students that everyone would study a different animal in order to encompass a wide range of animal life. It was amazing how many different animals the students chose. Very few had to choose their second or third choices. Now instead of dogs, cats, and horses, we had animals such as a Tasmanian devil, a dik-dik, and an opaki!

A simple worksheet was developed to ask key questions about the animal for their research. The students had to find out information on the animal's height, weight, size, habitat, and food, along with unusual facts. Each student had a book, article, and picture on their animal. Those who had trouble reading the material had help from their fourth grade reading buddies. It was amazing how many books, articles, and magazines from home were brought in by the students.

After reading about their animals and looking at pictures, the students were ready to draw their own pictures of the animals using a computer art program. The teachers found that it worked well for the students to do their drawings in the classroom before school in the morning and at other times throughout the day.

These pictures were used many different ways in the project. They were printed in color and combined with reports typed on the computer. These were displayed in the hallway. Each picture was also used to help illustrate a calendar. Using calendar software, the students created 12 month calendars with a different animal at the top of each month. Special days and birthdays were also added to the calendar for the students to keep.

Each picture was used in a presentation software program to create a multimedia presentation for an upcoming PTO meeting. Each child had 30 seconds to share something interesting about his animal. Their animal picture was also printed backwards along with the words "I am a panda expert," or whatever the animal was. These were then ironed on to t-shirts for the students to wear at the PTO meeting. Riddle books were made as were pop-up books about the animals.

Using the information they collected about animal weights, the students created a progression chart comparing the weights. The students were amazed how long their chart was between the weight of a hummingbird and the weight of an elephant. Another component added this year was graphing. The students had to decide whether their animals were meat-eaters, plant-eaters, or both, and a graph was made to incorporate math into the project. Social Studies was also brought into the project. Maps of the world were incorporated, and the students colored the area where their animals lived and made map keys.

Each year a different component of the curriculum has been added to the project to truly make this unit cross-curricular. The teachers who were very apprehensive in the beginning, really enjoy doing this unit; the students love it; the parents are impressed at how much their children know about animals and technology. Technology really is exciting!!

# TECHNOLOGY IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM

Technology plays a significant role in all aspects of American life today, and this role will only increase in the future. Just where does technology fit in regards to a developmentally appropriate classroom setting?

As technology becomes easier to use and more and more software programs are released, young children's use of technology will become more widespread. Early childhood teachers must examine the impact of technology on children and be prepared to use technology to benefit the children.

Research indicates that computers can be used in developmentally appropriate ways beneficial to children but also can be misused (Shade & Watson 1990). Shade & Watson's research goes on to say that developmentally appropriate software offers opportunities for collaborative play, learning, and creation. The research indicates that teachers must use professional judgement in evaluating and using this learning tool or experience. It also suggests weighing the costs of technology with the costs of other learning materials and program resources to arrive at an appropriate balance for the classroom.

In April 1996, The National Association for the Education of Young Children adopted a Position Statement on Technology and Young Children, ages three through eight. NAEYC outlines ***seven points*** in their position statement on technology.

1. In evaluating the appropriate use of technology, NAEYC applies principles of developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, 1987) and appropriate curriculum and assessment (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 1992).

2. Used appropriately, technology can enhance children's cognitive and social abilities.

3. Appropriate technology is integrated into the regular learning environment and used as one of many options to support children's learning.

4. Early childhood educators should promote equitable access to technology for all children and their families. Children with special needs should have increased access when this is helpful.

5. The power of technology to influence children's learning and development requires that attention be paid to eliminating stereotyping of any group and eliminating exposure to violence, especially as a problem solving strategy. Teachers should actively select software that promotes positive social values.

6. Teachers, in collaboration with parents, should advocate for more appropriate technology applications for all children.

7. The appropriate use of technology has many implications for early childhood professional development. Early childhood educators should use technology as a tool for communication and collaboration among professionals as well a tool for teaching children.

**In any given situation, professional judgement by the teacher is required to determine if a specific use of technology is age appropriate, individually appropriate, and culturally appropriate. The teachers's role is critical in making certain that good decisions are made about which technology to use and to support children in their use of technology.**

Teachers must take time to evaluate and choose software in light of principles of development and learning. Well-designed early childhood software grows in dimension with the child, enabling the child to find new challenges as she/he becomes more proficient. Teachers should choose software that is engaging, interactive, and provides opportunities for children to explore and problem solve. A technology-rich classroom includes a variety of hardware and software which focus on technology as a teaching and learning tool. Hardware includes computers, printers, scanners, cameras, laser disc players, VCRs, and modems. Software can be categorized in four areas: skill based, literature based, activity based, and project based.

Skill-based software emphasizes skill development in areas such as addition, sentence completion, or choosing the correct response. It often employs game like features, which at first capture a child's attention. Teachers who choose skill-based software must be careful to develop a focus for its use within the curriculum. Otherwise, a student may spend time practicing a skill that is not necessary, out of context, or is inappropriate for his/her level of development.

Literature-based software can extend literature by having students listen to a story read, write endings to stories, or create new versions of stories. Children may use events in the story to create illustrations, make a rebus, or sequence events in the story. Activity-based software is focused on one activity such as making cards, posters, invitations, banners, or calendars.

Project-based software can offer interdisciplinary or cross curricular opportunities. The software is an integral part of the lesson or topic the children are studying. For example, children may write and illustrate books around a topic and then incorporate video and sound with their story to create a slide show. Children can help the teacher complete a spreadsheet or database using information gathered on a topic. From the data base, they can create charts, graphs, reports, or make-up math story problems.

Children are naturally curious and love to explore. Therefore, computers are intrinsically compelling for many children. The sounds and graphics gain children's attention. Increasingly, children observe adults and older children working on computers, and they want to do it, too. When used appropriately, technology can support and extend traditional materials in valuable ways. The teacher needs to build on a child's natural curiosity and oral language strengths. How the teacher structures the use of the computer determines whether or not the activity is developmentally appropriate.

The classroom teacher should instill a sense of independence and encourage children to be self starters. Children are not afraid of technology. They can easily turn on the computer, take care of the computer area, and teach a new program. The computer is just another tool in the classroom and readily available to them to use.

Computers can foster social interaction. Children should be encouraged to work cooperatively at the computer in groups of two or three. Working together with the technology on a project helps children build strong social skills and create "team work." It is important to let children discuss what they are doing, share ideas, and problem solve.

Every classroom has its own guiding philosophies, values, schedules, themes, and activities. As part of the teacher's overall classroom plan, computers can be used in ways that support these existing classroom educational directions rather than distort or replace them. Computers should be integrated into early childhood practice physically, functionally, and philosophically. Teachers can accommodate integration in the following ways:

- Locate computers in the classroom, not in a separate computer lab.
- Integrate technology into the daily routine of activities.
- Choose software to enrich curriculum content.
- Use technology to integrate curriculum across subject matter areas.
- Extend the curriculum with technology offering new avenues and perspectives.

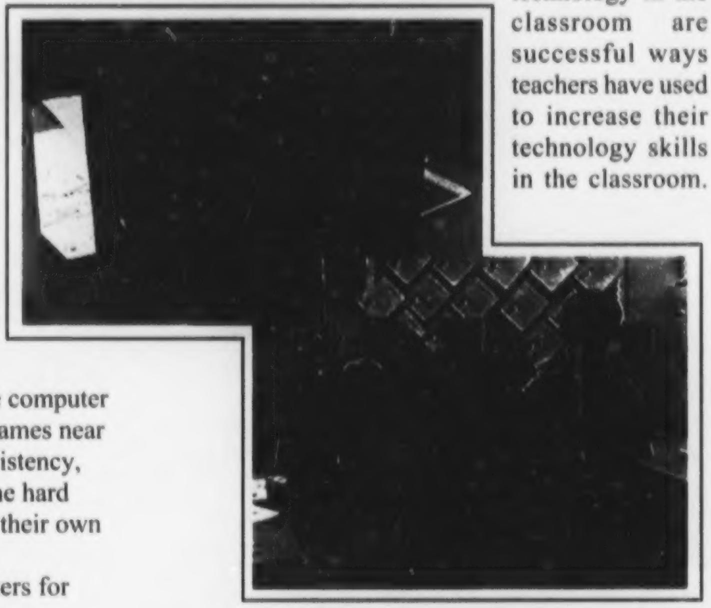
Technology should be used as an additional tool along with materials, such as books and manipulatives, and in activities that include plays, puppets, dancing, singing, art, and creative play. The lesson should not be designed to fit the technology, but rather the teacher should choose technology which will enhance the lesson. Technology does not replace existing activities but adds a new dimension to classroom strategies.

In writing compositions, children can compose directly on the computer. Children may spend more time writing their stories because editing is easier. Self-worth is enhanced as they take pride in seeing their work published. Some teachers have the children rotate through the computer learning center each day. They write journal entries, rewrite published stories, create new stories, plays, poems, and write reports. An author sharing time each day allows children to read their writing to the class.

Young children can also effectively use and explore the Internet. They use communication skills to read and write e-mail messages to each other. They learn about other cultures and places as they send messages to students in other states and countries. Research skills are developed as they explore teacher selected web sites and participate in Internet classroom projects. Some schools purchase site licenses for Internet education networks such as *Scholastic Place* and *National Geographic Kids Network*.

The mandate is clear that teachers should work to create an instructional environment that supports equitable access to technology for all children and addresses their specific needs relating to gender, race, culture, languages, and disabilities. Female teachers can become strong role models in conveying the importance of technology to young girls by actively using the computer in the classroom. The message is clear as to the appropriateness of girls using technology when equal time is given to both genders to use the computerand by pairing boys and girls on computer projects. By selecting appropriate software, teachers can tailor the activities to language and culture.

Managing computer time and access is often a critical issue teachers face when computers are located in the classroom. Placing computers in the classroom provides the greatest access for all children. With a limited number of computers in a classroom, the teacher is faced with the problem of providing equal time at the computer for each student and keeping track of what each child is doing. Many teachers have had success with the following suggestions:



- Have each student go to the same computer each time. Post a list of student names near the computer. This provides consistency, and students are able to save to the hard drive making it easier to manage their own files.
- Place kitchen timers near computers for work in 15 or 20 minute intervals.
- Place computers in learning centers or activity stations. This makes a more integrated learning activity rather than just "computer time."

Equity is a critical issue. Schools and libraries can provide opportunities for children who do not have computers at home to access technologies during the regular instructional day before and after school. Some schools have paid aides and/or parent volunteers to make the technology available before and after school. Many schools have opened their facilities in the evenings and on Saturdays for families to work and share computer experiences together.

On-going staff development is essential to a technology-rich classroom that encourages student interaction, collaboration, and problem solving. Teachers change the way they teach as they use technology, but just learning the technology is not enough to create an integrated technology classroom. Teachers need to learn how to design interdisciplinary units that use technology in developmentally appropriate ways.

Teachers should be encouraged to establish personal goals and objectives for continuous staff development growth. Visiting other schools who effectively use technology, participating in hands-on workshops, attending conferences, and developing mentor/coach relationships in implementing technology in the classroom are successful ways teachers have used to increase their technology skills in the classroom.

Learning technology becomes less time consuming when teachers rely on each other's expertise instead of trying to learn everything individually.

Whenever possible, teachers should invite small numbers of students to learn the technology with them. In a busy classroom, students can often teach each other how to use the software without the teacher's direct involvement.

The prominence of technology in the classroom will continue to increase as more high-end hardware and interactive software become available. As the world becomes more global and competitive, it is important for both teachers and students to become knowledgeable users of technology. Our teachers are challenged to use it in effective and developmentally appropriate ways.

**Teacher Story**

# LEARNING HOW TO SURF THE INTERNET

*Tammy Payton, Kindergarten Teacher*
*Loogootee Elementary West, Loogootee*

Children need time to explore new learning tools before they can use them. They need to understand what a tool can do before they are "restricted" to a narrow use or formal use of that tool. If a child is pushed too quickly to use a tool before they've been given time to explore, they'll "take time" to play! Give a child a set of cubes or any kind of math manipulatives that they've never used. The first thing a child does is "play" with that tool. If they've not had time to explore and play with that tool, they focus on the tool rather than on the math concept they are trying to learn.

The Internet is another kind of learning tool. Children need time to discover how browsers work and what information they can find on the Internet. By beginning with a familiar concept that needs little research or discovery on the children's part, the child can focus on learning how to use and navigate the Internet. Critical thinking skills, as well as researching skills, can be developed by using this simple approach.

The Internet can be a safe, informative place for children to discover the world around them. Teach children to use appropriate search tools that are designed for their use. These search tools will open the World Wide Web world to them in a safe and fun way. There are search tools that are designed for school age children's use. Two examples are:

→ Yahooligans <http://www.yahooligans.com>
This is the search engine the summer school children learned to use. This is a GREAT tool for primary age children to use.

→ K-12 World Search
<http://www.k-12world. com>
This search engine is sponsored by Alta Vista. This tool is more appropriate for intermediate and high school students to use.

**RULES FOR SURFING SAFELY ON THE INTERNET**

1. I will not give out personal information such as my address, telephone number, parent's work address, or name and location of my school without my parent's permission.

2. If I join a game or chat group on the Internet, with my parent's permission, I will never tell anyone my password to that game or chat group.

3. I will tell my parents right away if I come across any information that makes me feel uncomfortable.

4. I will never agree to get together with someone I meet online without first checking with my parents.

5. I will never send a person my picture or anything else without first checking with my parents.

6. I will not respond to any messages that are mean or in any way make me feel uncomfortable.

7. I will talk with my parents so that we can set up rules for going online.

(Each student and the student's parent should sign and return an "Acceptable Use Policy" before the student is allowed to use the Internet. Also, each student and the student's parents should sign and return a permission slip stating that the student's work and/or picture may be published on the Internet before any work is published.)

Research www sites on Internet Safety.
Loogootee has a webpage dedicated to this topic:
<http://www.siec.k12.in.us/~west/surf.htm>

# early years are learning years

## Technology in early childhood programs

As technology becomes more accessible to early childhood programs and computer software becomes more user-friendly, early childhood educators have a responsibility to examine its impact on children and prepare themselves to use it for all children's benefit. Here are some tips for professionals in evaluating computer programs, which can be used—like any other learning tool—in developmentally appropriate or inappropriate ways.

1. **Early childhood professionals must apply the principles of developmentally appropriate practice and appropriate curriculum and assessment when choosing technology for use in their classrooms or programs.**
   Even technological learning tools must be appropriate for the age and experience of children in a particular group. Software that is little more than an electronic worksheet does little to increase children's understanding of concepts.

2. **Used appropriately, technology can improve children's thinking ability and help them develop good relationships with peers.**
   Developmentally appropriate software engages children in conversation and creative play. It also helps develop children's problem-solving abilities. Ideally, computer software should be designed to grow with children, offering more challenges as they learn new skills.

3. **Technology should be integrated into daily learning activities.**
   Computers should not replace or disrupt existing program routines. This can be accomplished by locating computers in the classroom rather than in a separate lab. Teachers can choose software to further enrich the everyday curriculum, and bridge the gaps between different subjects, like music and math.

4. **Teachers should work for equity in access to technology for all children and their families.**
   Research has found that girls use computers in and out of school less often than boys do; African American students have less access to computers than White students; and richer schools buy more equipment and more expensive equipment (Sutton, 1991). If educators do not work to provide access to technology for all children, the gaps in children's ability and familiarity with technology will widen.

   Technology has many potential benefits for children with special needs and may be essential for successful inclusion. Software may function as an "on-demand" tutor, meeting children's individual needs, learning styles, and preferences. And, when used appropriately, it may encourage and enable all children to think and work independently.

5. **Technology has a powerful influence over children's learning—it must not teach them to stereotype or use violence to solve their problems.**
   Software can reflect children's diverse cultures, languages, and ethnic heritages; it should depict the world children live in and encourage them to appreciate diversity. Teachers and caregivers are challenged to discover software programs that promote positive social values, and encourage tolerance and exploration of the richness in their own and other cultures.

   Beware of violence and brutality in today's software, which often mirrors that of movies and TV. It is even more disturbing when destruction is used as a means of solving problems in computer software, because the software allows children to cause violence themselves, rather than just witness it on the screen. Software that allows children to destroy without facing actual consequences may hinder them from learning personal responsibility.

6. **Work together with parents to promote appropriate uses of technology.**
   Early childhood parents both have a responsibility to educate themselves on the benefits of technology for children's education. Yet they must also make smart choices as consumers and inform software developers when they are unhappy or happy with products. Together, parents and professionals can advocate for software that encourages cooperation among children, caters to the needs of children with varying abilities, reflects productive and nonviolent ways of solving problems, and offers positive representations of gender, cultural and linguistic diversity, and physical abilities.

To receive a copy of NAEYC's position statement on Technology and Young Children, Ages 3 through 8, see the September, 1996 issue of Young Children, or send a SASE to NAEYC Public Affairs, Box #602, 1509 16th St., NW, Washington. DC 20036-1426.

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# early years are learning years

## Technology and young children: What parents should know

It is not unusual to see a young child today slip a CD into a stereo system, set a digital alarm clock, or even program a VCR. Children quickly learn to use technology that is part of their daily lives, often with greater ease than their parents or other adults. But does their ability to do these complex tasks really enhance children's development? Does using technology really teach children new skills? What should parents know about the role of technology in children's learning?

According to NAEYC's *Young Children: Active Learners in a Technological Age*, computers can be active or passive agents for learning. Parents who recognize the difference will choose appropriate computer programs for their children. As passive users, children utilize tools with no understanding of the concepts represented on the screen. The computer becomes an electronic worksheet that asks children to memorize without comprehending. As active agents for learning, computers extend children's abilities, helping them to accomplish goals and objectives. In active use, children understand the relationship between real ideas and what is being represented on the screen. Constructing relationships between pictures and concrete objects helps children establish meaning.

In order to promote effective computer learning, parents should monitor the quality of the software children use, the amount of time children work with it, and the way in which they use it.

What should you teach your pre-school children about technology? Here are some suggestions:

- People control technology, and technology can be used for activities that are meaningful to people.
- Technology can take different forms, as in calculators, telephones, and tape recorders. It provides different, useful things in a variety of ways.
- Technology has rules that control how it works. Objects must have a source of power—they have plugs or batteries; computers must have instructions—either built-in or provided by the user.
- Computer programs require different ways of organizing thinking. Some will ask you to match and rhyme, others will give you the freedom to draw or paint whatever you wish.

Some parents express concerns about the role of technology in children's lives, such as how it will affect children's attention to social relationships and other activities. Appropriate computer programs promote dialog between children, as well as group problem-solving. They also offer opportunities for shared experiences between parents and children. As partners in our children's learning, we may not only monitor their educational environments, but we may experience their progress first-hand.

### Checking out good software for children:

1. Software uses pictures and spoken instructions rather than written ones so that children will not need to ask for help.
2. Children control the level of difficulty, the pace and direction of the program.
3. Software offers variety: children can explore a number of topics on different levels.
4. Children receive quick feedback, so they stay interested.
5. Program utilizes the capacities of today's computers by appealing to children through interesting sights and sounds.
6. To determine a product's appropriateness for a child's current level of development, parents have evaluated the skill list and activities as described on the package, and previewed the product through store demonstration or a friend's computer.
7. Software engages children's interest by encouraging children to laugh and use their imagination in exploring.
8. The program allows children to experience success and feel empowered through learning.

**Resources**:

Wright, J.L. & D.D. Shade, *Young children: Active learners in a technological age*. NAEYC #341/$7.
*The adventure begins: Preschool and technology*. NAEYC video series. #827/$20.

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# CLASSROOM CLIMATE AND DAILY SCHEDULES

*There is no question that life in classrooms is crowded. And making learning communities—coming together, keeping together, and learning together—is not easy. It is far easier to dominate and require obedience. But if the prospect of encouraging the social nature of learning lets out students experience genuine learning and helps them uncover ideas that make a sound in their hearts, isn't that a compelling argument for trying?*

*Ralph Peterson*
From *Life in a Crowded Place* (1992)

# CLASSROOM CLIMATE AND DAILY SCHEDULES

The classroom climate should be a place where responsibilities are shared and the atmosphere is safe and caring. In this chapter you will find articles from teachers and professional journals concerning this subject. The chapter is divided into the following sections:

## I. Creating a Classroom Climate

- ☐ Teacher Story: *Developing Classroom Rules and Solving Social Situations* by Denise Ogren
- ☐ *Implications for Teachers* by ERIC
- ☐ *Classroom Climate*

## II. Taking a Look at Behavior

- ☐ *Misbehavior or Mistaken Behavior* by Dan Gartrell
- ☐ *Neurological Brain Disorders in Children* by Robert W. Burke and Gail B. Adams
- ☐ *Symmetric Tonic Neck Reflex* by Nancy O'Dell and Patricia Cook
- ☐ *Time Out for "Time Out"* by NAEYC

## III. Organizing the Classroom Schedule

- ☐ *Telling Time* by Mimi Chenfeld
- ☐ Teacher Story: *Teaching in an All Day Kindergarten* by Kathy Politz
- ☐ Teacher Story: *A Day in a Third Grade Classroom* by Marolyn Krauss
- ☐ Teacher Story: *A Day in a Multi-Age Classroom* by Becky Lane
- ☐ Organizing the Classroom Schedule
- ☐ A sample day in a Full-Day Preschool
- ☐ A sample day in a Special Needs Full-Day Preschool
- ☐ A sample day in a Half-Day Kindergarten
- ☐ A sample day in a Full-Day Kindergarten
- ☐ A sample day in a K-1 Multi-Age Classroom
- ☐ A sample day in a First Grade Classroom
- ☐ A sample day in a Second Grade Classroom
- ☐ A sample day in a Third Grade Classroom

## IV. Classroom Climate and Daily Schedules References and Resources

# DEVELOPING CLASSROOM RULES AND SOLVING SOCIAL SITUATIONS

**Teacher Story**

*Denise Ogren*
*Edgewood Early Childhood Center, Ellettsville*

During the first week of school, the children and I gather in the community meeting place and develop a simple set of classroom rules. Acting as the facilitator, I lead off with open-ended questions such as: "What can each one of us do, as members of our community, to make our room a good place to work and learn? What things do we want to see happen in our room, and what things do we not want to happen?" As the children brainstorm their ideas, I record the responses on chart paper in front of the group.

Children agree that they must all help to make our room a good place to work, play, and learn. The children brainstorm things that they do not want to happen in the room: everyone talking at the same time, yelling out, hitting, pushing, etc. After much discussion, we begin to generate some basic rules or **positive** actions that we want to occur in the classroom. As a group, we continue to discuss these things, and the children notice many of their ideas can be put together under one title or name, for example: **BE KIND, BE SAFE.** I record these on a large sheet of chart paper and hang them in a conspicuous place.

Each day, we **briefly** review our classroom rules and talk about ways to handle problems. As situations arise, it may be necessary to call all the children back to the community meeting place to discuss the situation and how we can best solve the problem. As the classroom facilitator, I am there to guide and encourage the children to solve their own conflicts, assisting them if necessary.

> *"How can parents and teachers recognize and foster the cooperative behaviors which all children demonstrate as they develop? They can acknowledge children's efforts to initiate social interactions in appropriate ways, affirm helping behaviors, use positive discipline techniques... communicate positive regard and high expectations for all young children, and support each child's struggle to resolve interpersonal conflicts. Of critical importance are classroom strategies that promote cooperative, rather than competitive, endeavors; foster dramatic play techniques and reflective strategies for thinking about and discussing social interactions; and enable children to get to know and trust each other and work towards truly interdependent activity."*
>
> (Source: Jewett, J. (1992). *Aggression and Cooperation: Helping Young Children Develop Constructive Strategies.* ERIC Digest. Reprinted by permission.)

## IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS

- Teachers need to be aware of children's intentions. Is this conflict one that the children are truly trying to resolve, or is it verbal play? Teachers should help children make clear their own understanding of the conflict.
- Children's ability to resolve conflicts increases as their verbal competence and ability to take other perspectives grow. If children are verbal and empathetic, teachers should let them try to work things out.
- Teachers' decisions to intervene should be made after they observe the issues of children's conflicts. Possession issues and name-calling generate less discussion than issues about facts or play decisions.
- Children who explain their actions to each other are likely to create their own solutions. In conflicts characterized by physical strategies and simple verbal oppositions, teachers should help children find more words to use.
- Teachers should note whether the children were playing together before the conflict. Prior interaction and friendship motivate children to resolve disputes on their own.
- Teachers can reduce the frustration of constant conflict by making play spaces accessible and providing ample materials for sharing.
- Children often rely on adults who are frequently happy to supply a "fair" solution. Teachers should give children time to develop their own resolutions and allow them the choice of negotiating, changing the activity, dropping the issue, or creating new rules.
- Many conflicts do not involve aggression, and children are frequently able to resolve their disputes. Teachers should provide appropriate guidance, yet allow children to manage their own conflicts and resolutions.

(Source: Wheeler, E.J. (1994). *Peer Conflicts in the Classroom*. ERIC. Reprinted by permission.)

# CLASSROOM CLIMATE

## A Climate Where Responsibilities are Shared and the Atmosphere is Safe and Caring

Young children must begin to develop the skills needed for cooperative living in the early years in order for them to become responsible citizens later in life. The concept of a classroom community is not new. Children need an environment in which they have the opportunity to learn through meaningful experiences, develop their abilities to the fullest, participate in activities that interest them, take risks, and join with others to make learning meaningful. "Learning is social. The work of Vygotsky (1978) calls attention to the importance of others where learning is concerned. The position taken is that 'learning awakens a variety of internal processes that operate only when the child is interacting with others in his environment and in cooperation with his peers' " (Peterson, 1992, p. 3). Children deepen their own understandings when they talk and listen to others. Rather than sitting quietly at individual desks, taking in information, and filling in workbook pages, children should be given opportunities to think and work together in complicated and critical ways.

Each classroom community develops its own structure: a set of rules, common understandings, and systems that all members agree to follow. This structure helps the children feel safe and secure, knowing what to expect and how to act appropriately. The children learn to develop self-discipline, share the responsibility for keeping the classroom neat, and take ownership and responsibility for their own learning. The classroom needs to be a well-organized environment with daily schedules and routines that are predictable and have clear expectations about appropriate classroom behavior.

The well-being and academic success of children flourish in this type of atmosphere. Teachers can better address each child's basic needs, teach respect and responsibility, and enable social and academic competence. In a community of learners, each member is valued. Children better understand the rules and systems because they help to create them, re-evaluate, and change them if necessary.

### Community in the Classroom

In a learning community, the teacher must assume the role of a facilitator who guides each child toward his learning potential. The teacher must be willing to be receptive and accepting of the children's ideas. The teacher and children should work together to discuss problems and possible solutions. Opportunities should be provided for problem solving and the development of good communication skills.

The building of a classroom community begins the first day of school. The teacher welcomes each child to the community and conveys an atmosphere of trust, respect, flexibility, and genuine caring to the children. The teacher and children begin to develop rules which will ensure a safe and positive environment. Daily class meetings should be held to share ideas and discuss issues of importance to group living.

In evaluating the appropriateness of rules and limits, the following questions may be asked:

- Are the children involved in setting rules and defining classroom limitations?
- Are the children involved in determining the actions which should be taken when rules are consistently broken?
- Are the rules and limits made for reasons of safety and to ensure positive classroom interactions?
- Are the rules and limits stated **positively,** and do they clearly define the expected behavior?
- Are the rules and limits regarding the expected behaviors consistently followed?

The teaching of social skills needs to be an integral part of the entire curriculum. Some children have had little experience playing or interacting with peers; consequently, many have not developed these important social skills. Teachers must model respectful interactions.

" 'Teachers' observations of the benefits of teaching children to work collaboratively are confirmed by research. Children's relationships with peers, especially those of different ethnic, socio-economic, and ability groups, are improved through collaborative learning' (Slavin, 1987). In classrooms where collaborative learning is successfully implemented, teachers find they have fewer behavior problems and children are more accepting of differences" (Dodge, 1994, p. 68).

### Working with Children in Large Groups

- ✓ Use a soft voice — children will try to hear you.
- ✓ When demonstrating, make sure each child can see you.
- ✓ Try to be at the children's level (on the floor, at the table...).
- ✓ Tell children what **to** do versus what **not** to do.
- ✓ Use positive language rather than negative.
- ✓ Move your lesson along — do not dwell on minor points.
- ✓ Check to make sure that you have the children's attention.
- ✓ Use eye contact and interact with the children.

# II. Taking a Look at Behavior

## MISBEHAVIOR OR MISTAKEN BEHAVIOR

*Dan Gartrell, Ed.D*
*Bemidji State University, Minnesota*

(Excerpt from Misbehavior or Mistaken Behavior, *Young Children*, 50(5), 1995, p. 27-34.
Reprinted with permission from NAEYC.)

A common situation in early childhood classrooms is when two children argue over use of a toy car. In this scenario two teachers handle the situation differently. **Teacher one** arrives, takes the car, and declares that because the children are not using it appropriately, they will have to find something else to do. One child sits on a chair and looks sad; the other child sticks up an index finger (wrong finger) at the teacher's back as she puts the car on the shelf (Gartrell,1994).

**Teacher two** arrives, gets down on the children's level and holds the car. She says, "We have a problem. Please use your words so we can solve this problem." With a bit of coaching, the two children determine that one child had the car first and the other wanted it. The teacher then helps the second child find "an almost new car that no one is using." The children play together using the two cars.

### Traditional classroom discipline vs. conflict resolution and guidance

In their responses, the first teacher used traditional classroom discipline; the second used conflict resolution (Wichert,1989), an important technique in guidance. As commonly practiced, traditional discipline has failed to distinguish between nonpunitive teacher intervention and punishment (Gartrell,1987; Reynolds,1990). The effects of punishment—diminished self-esteem, loss of enjoyment of learning, negative feelings toward self and others— make its use inappropriate in the classroom setting (Bredekamp,1987).

The difference between these two approaches is that traditional discipline criticizes children—often publicly—for unacceptable behaviors, whereas guidance teaches children positive alternatives, "what they can do instead." Traditional discipline punishes children for having problems they cannot solve, while guidance teaches children to solve their problems in socially acceptable ways (Gartrell,1994).

One of the joys of teaching young children, despite a continuing lack of resources in the early childhood field, is the capacity of the professional to be fully nurturing within the teaching role. The practice of guidance, the creation and maintenance of a positive learning environment for each child, supports the nurturing function. Guidance connotes activism on the teacher's part (Gartrell,1994). The teacher who uses guidance is not permissive; she does not let children struggle vis-a-vis boundaries that may not be there. Instead, she provides leadership so that children can interact successfully within the reasonable boundaries of the classroom community.

### "Misbehavior" makes us think of punishing

As classroom guidance continues to displace a reliance on traditional discipline, it is important that educators reevaluate other widely used terms and practices. One such term is misbehavior. Traditionally, misbehavior implies willful wrongdoing for which a child must be disciplined (punished). . . .

### "Mistaken behavior" makes us think of guiding and educating

**. . .In the process of learning the complex life skills of cooperation, conflict resolution, and acceptable expression of strong feelings, children, like all of**

**us, *make mistakes*** (Gartrell,1987). The guidance tradition in early childhood education suggests that teachers who traditionally have considered problems in the classroom as misbehaviors think of them instead as mistaken behaviors (MnAEYC,1991). . . .

. . .In the cognitive domain, a child who asks, "Is him going, too, teacher?" is not treated as though she has misbehaved. In an affirming manner, the teacher models the conventional usage, "Yes, Carlita, he is going, too." In the realm of behavior, the teacher also uses a positive approach. Children are not punished for the mistakes of words or deeds; they are helped to learn from their mistaken behavior. The concept of mistaken behavior fits well with the guidance approach. . . .

### Three levels of mistaken behavior

. . .From almost 30 years of teaching and observing in early childhood classrooms, I have identified three levels of mistaken behavior, based on Harlow's writings (Gartrell,1987, 1994). . . .(T)he levels of mistaken behavior share motivational sources with the relational patterns. The levels of mistaken behavior identify the types of problems children in the various relational patterns are likely to experience.

### Level three:
### Strong-needs mistaken behavior

Children showing the survival relational pattern likely have experienced their environment as a "dangerous and painful place" over which they have little control (Harlow, 1975). The behavior patterns of these children tend to be rigid and exaggerated. To protect themselves, they resist change and continue the same behaviors in new situations, even if their patterns are extreme and inappropriate.

**The child at the survival level is difficult for teachers to accept because of the nonsocial, at times antisocial, character of the child's behavior.** Yet it is necessary for the teacher to establish a productive relationship, built on trust, in order to empower the child to progress to a higher relational level.

Children at the survival relational pattern show *level-three, strong-needs mistaken behavior*. Wherever it occurs, this level of mistaken behavior is the most serious. A sure sign that the mistaken behavior is at level three is that it continues over time. (Anyone, including teachers, can have an occasional "level three" day.) As Harlow suggests, strong-needs mistaken behavior results from psychological and/or physical pain in the child's life that is beyond the child's ability to cope with and understand. Often children show strong-needs mistaken behavior in the classroom because it is a safe haven in their environment. Through withdrawal or acting out, these children are asking for help in the only way they can (Gartrell,1994).

As the most serious level of mistaken behavior, the teacher takes a comprehensive approach with the child that usually involves other adults, especially parents or caregivers. The teacher

- intervenes nonpunitively;
- works to build a positive relationship with the child;
- seeks more information through observation;
- seeks more information through conversation with the child, other adults who work with the child, and parents or caregivers;
- creates a coordinated "individual guidance plan" in consultation with the other adults; and
- implements, reviews, and modifies the plan as necessary (Gartrell,1994).

Sometimes level-three mistaken behaviors are symptoms of such deep problems in the child's life that the comprehensive guidance approach is not completely successful. Even when working with parents, the teacher cannot necessarily change life circumstances for a child, but he can make life easier—in ways that may have lasting beneficial effects.

### Level two:
### Socially influenced mistaken behavior

Children who show the adjustment relational pattern have an increased ability to adapt to situations. Their criteria for doing so, however, is the judgement of significant others. "New ways of thinking and behaving are first sanctioned by an individual or reference group representing authority, before they are considered by the adjuster" (Harlow, 1975, p.30). Children at the adjustment level seek high levels of teacher approval, put off completing tasks because "I can't do it right," and may involve adults or other children in doing their projects for them. They lack the self-esteem and individual strength necessary to respond to a situation on its own terms.

**Some teachers find gratification in the obedience and dependence of a child at the adjustment level.** They may be reinforcing long-term, other-directed response tendencies in the child, however, that inhibit full personal development (Harlow, 1975). Deprived of confidence in his own values and judgement, the child may continue to be influenced by others—especially peers—including toward self-destructive or oppressive mistaken behaviors (Gartrell,1994). With a child at the adjustment level, the task of the teacher is to nudge him toward autonomy (the encountering relational pattern) by helping him build self-esteem and proactive social skills (Harlow, 1975).

Children showing the adjustment relational pattern are subject to *level-two, socially influenced mistaken behavior*. Level-two mistaken behaviors are "learned behaviors," reinforced in the child, intentionally or unintentionally, by other people important in the child's life. A child who uses an expletive in a classroom exactly as an adult would is showing a socially influenced mistaken behavior. Likewise, children who join others in calling a child "poopy butt" or "dorky" have been influenced by peers into a level-two mistaken behavior.

In responding to level-two mistaken behaviors, the teacher notes whether one child or a group of children are involved. When a group of children are involved, an effective technique, even with preschoolers (Hendrick,1992), is the class meeting. Respecting the dignity of all concerned, the teacher points out the problem and, with the children, works out a solution. The teacher monitors progress and calls additional meetings, if necessary. If one child is involved, the teacher handles the situation privately; in a firm but friendly manner, explains what is unacceptable; and provides a guideline for an acceptable alternative. In either individual or group situations, the teacher follows up with encouragement and "compliment sandwiches"—two or three acknowledgments of progress along with one reminder of the agreed-to guideline (Gartrell,1994) (it is easier for us to change behaviors when others acknowledge our efforts). By assisting children to learn alternatives to socially influenced mistaken behavior, the teacher helps them to understand that they have the capacity to evaluate, choose, and interact for themselves—essential life skills for a democracy (Wittmer & Honig,1994).

### Level one:
### Experimentation mistaken behavior

Harlow's construct of relational patterns is built around the importance of autonomy—Piaget's term for the ability of the individual to make intelligent, ethical decisions (Kamii,1984). Autonomy is the social relation pattern shown by children at the highest level, *encountering* (Harlow, 1975).

Children at the encountering level are learning most effectively about themselves and the world; yet, because they are so open to new experience and because they are young, they are susceptible to mistaken behavior—and vulnerable to teacher criticism. . . .

. . .Children at the encountering relational pattern show *level-one, experimentation mistaken behavior*. The term *experimentation* is used because the child is learning through full engagement in the experiment of life. To cite the previous illustration, the two children who argued over use of the toy car were totally involved in that situation; they were demonstrating level-one mistaken behavior. The experimentation can be "natural," through full involvement in the affairs of the classroom, or it can be "controlled," as in the case of a young child who, with a smile, uses an expletive in order to see the teacher's reaction.

The teacher responds in different ways to different situations. Sometimes he may step back and allow a child to learn from the experience; other times, he will reiterate a guideline and, in a friendly tone, teach a more appropriate alternative behavior. With children at level one, as with those at two and three, the teacher uses guidance and avoids the use of traditional discipline.

### Understanding
### mistaken behaviors

An occasional misunderstanding about mistaken behavior is that some mistaken behaviors occur at only level one, others at level two, and still others at level three (Gartrell,1994). At each level, mistaken behaviors have distinct motivational sources. Behaviors that appear similar can be a result of differing motivations, and so be at different levels. The teacher must observe carefully to infer the motivation and the level of mistaken behavior in order to respond effectively. Figure 2 illustrates how similar mistaken behaviors can be at different levels.

**Figure 2. Classifying Similar Mistaken Behaviors by Level**

| Incident of mistaken behavior | Motivational Source | Level of mistaken behavior |
|---|---|---|
| Child uses expletive | • Wants to see the teacher's reaction<br>• Wants to emulate important others<br>• Expresses deeply felt hostility | One<br>Two<br>Three |
| Child pushes another off the trike | • Wants trike; has not learned to ask in words<br>• Follows aggrandizement practices modeled by other children<br>• Feels the need to act out against the world by asserting power | One<br>Two<br>Three |
| Child refuses to join in group activity | • Does not understand teacher's expectations<br>• Has "gotten away" with not joining in<br>• Is not feeling well or feels strong anxiety about participating | One<br>Two<br>Three |

At any relational level, the cause of mistaken behavior is insufficient understanding about how to act maturely in the complex situations of life. With a child's internal need to go forward and to learn—but limited ability to balance her own needs with those of others—mistaken behavior will occur. Knowledge of the relational patterns and the levels of mistaken behavior assists the teacher to understand and work with children when they make mistakes (Gartrell,1994).

### The issue of intentionality

When people think about behavior, they may associate mistaken behavior with "accidents" and misbehavior with acts "done on purpose" (Gartrell,1994). Mistaken behavior includes both accidents and intentional behaviors. A young child on a trike who runs over the toe of another child by accident has shown level-one mistaken behavior. The accident was unintentional but was level one because it was a mistake that arose from involvement.

A child may run over another's foot for a second reason related to level one (Gartrell,1994). As a part of encountering social relations, the trike rider hits the other's foot "accidentally on purpose" to see what will happen. The lack of development of young children results in their difficulty understanding how another child would feel under such circumstances. The act was intentional but was done without full awareness of the consequences and so is level-one mistaken behavior. The importance of the term *mistaken behavior* is that it reminds the adult that the trike rider needs guidance about human feelings and the consequences of actions, not punishment for making a mistake.

Of course, hitting another child's foot might also be a level-two or level-three mistaken behavior (Gartrell,1994). At level two, one child follows another on a trike. The second rider sees the first swing close to a bystander and follows suit but strikes the bystander's foot. At level three, a trike rider who is harboring feelings of hostility acts out against an innocent child. When the teacher hypothesizes that level two or level three is involved, she reacts with increasing degrees of firmness, although she retains the element of friendliness, which is at the heart of guidance. If the trike rider's motives indicate that strong-needs mistaken behavior is present, the teacher should follow up as suggested for level three.

The additional step is important because serious mistaken behaviors occur when children are the victims of life circumstances that are beyond their control. Even the mistaken behavior of aggression is a nonverbal request for assistance, not a situation requiring punishment.

It should be noted that whatever the level of mistaken behavior, the teacher reacts to the immediate situation by using guidance. She first gives attention to the victim, who deserves it. This action shows support for the wronged child (and also may help the teacher calm down). The teacher then speaks with the trike rider. She does some empathy building by pointing out that the trike hurt the other child and she cannot let anyone (including the trike rider) be hurt at school. She discusses with the trike rider how he could avoid having this problem next time. Although the teacher does not force an apology, she perhaps asks how the trike rider could help the child who was hurt feel better. The teacher then assists the trike rider back into positive activity, which often includes helping him to make amends. In guidance practice the teacher avoids the traditional discipline reaction. She does not lecture about how naughty the behavior was or automatically put the child in a time-out. The goal is to help the child learn from the mistake, not punish him for making it.

Again, the value of the term *mistaken behavior* is that it has different implications than the conventional term, *misbehavior*. Misbehavior tends to connote a judgement of character that leads to punishment rather than guidance. Mistaken behavior precludes character assessment and asks that the child be accepted as a person of worth (by virtue of being alive). The person may need to face consequences, but at the base of those consequences is guidance, so the possibility of change is maximized (Gartrell,1994).

A premise in the use of guidance is that even willful acts that are done "on purpose" still constitute mistaken behavior. A child who deliberately bites or intentionally disobeys has made a mistake. The adult who is able to approach children as worthwhile individuals who make mistakes is in a philosophically strong position to assist them with healthy personal and social development.

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*"Many adults assume that the alternative to a highly structured, teacher-directed classroom must be chaos. In fact, the opposite is more often true. The visitor to a developmentally appropriate primary classroom is often surprised to see children working together in small groups with minimal teacher supervision. In contrast, teachers in more traditional classrooms tend to spend considerable amounts of time trying to control disruptive behavior that results when all children are expected to behave in the same way at the same time, regardless of their developmental needs" (SREB, 1994, p. 13).*

# NEURBIOLOGICAL DISORDERS IN CHILDREN

*Robert W. Burke, Ph.D.*
*Ball State University*
*Gail B. Adams, Ed.D.*
*University of Illinois at Chicago Medical Center*

Early childhood professionals help meet the wide-ranging needs of young children. It is important that we continue to remember that every child is unique: children are as different on the inside as they are in outward physical appearance. At the same time, it is important to recognize the valuable information provided by developmental psychologists and others who study typical patterns of human growth and development. These theorists and researchers have informed our educational practice in numerous ways, including the identification of normal ages and stages in children's learning and the conditions that facilitate optimum child growth.

On a related front in medical science, there has been very recent research conducted on the human brain. Some of this information has already made its way to the attention of teachers, administrators, and other early childhood professionals. Brain-compatible instruction (see, for example, Caine and Caine, 1991) is but one example of how findings from this research have been incorporated into classroom practice.

In addition to these recent discoveries about children's typical brain growth, development, and functioning, medical researchers have made a number of important discoveries about what happens in a person's brain that may result in atypical functioning. These discoveries about brain disorders are of real importance to early childhood educators. Because these children spend a significant part of each day in a school setting, the teacher's role in their lives is pivotal. Child psychiatrist, Harold Koplewicz (1996) says that "aside from his mother and father, the most important adult in a child's life is his teacher" (p. 22). All early childhood professionals should be encouraged to learn about childhood brain disorders, because these educators are in a unique position to help identify troubled children early in life. As with most disorders, early identification can lead to prompt intervention, thereby saving the child from years of unnecessary and often silent suffering.

The information presented in this section has been written with the regular classroom early childhood teacher in mind, for it is these teachers who are most likely to initially encounter undiagnosed and/or inappropriately educated children suffering from neurobiological brain disorders. This information may also be of interest to early childhood special education teachers, school counselors, and administrators—but it is assumed that once a child has been referred to these specialists s/he has already been identified as having a serious concern related to school functioning.

### No-Fault Brain Disorders

We have known for some time that when a child is born s/he enters the world with many characteristics already determined by genetic composition. Recent medical research now suggests that the structure and functioning of the brain is determined largely by genetic factors and, further, that some brain disorders are primarily genetically determined: "A no-fault brain disorder. . .exists not because of what a child's parents do but because of how his brain works, the brain that he was born with. . .a child's brain disorder is not his parent's fault. It's nobody's fault" (Koplewicz, 1996, p.xii).

No-fault brain disorders are not rare or unusual, as was once believed. Indeed, Koplewicz (1996) cites a recent report from the Institute of Medicine which suggests that 12 percent of all American children under the age of 18 have a diagnosable brain disorder—a total of 7.5 million children (p. 5). Koplewicz's list of neurobiological, no-fault brain disorders includes: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Separation Anxiety Disorder (SAD), Social

Phobia/Shyness, Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Enuresis/Bed wetting, Tourette Syndrome (TS), Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), Bipolar Disorder/Manic Depressive Illness, Schizophrenia, Eating Disorders, Conduct Disorder (CD), Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) and Autism.

Research into these disorders has focused on the physical structure, chemical composition, and functioning of the brain. It has been found that, for some of these disorders, medication that alters the brain's chemistry results in a reduction of the child's distressing symptoms (Pato and Zohar, 1991). Other research, employing high-tech imaging, has revealed that the brain of a person with a neurobiological disorder (NBD) like Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) produces and uses energy in ways that are different from normal brain functioning (Schwartz, 1996). Summarizing the recent research on atypical brain functioning, Koplewicz (1996) says, "The fact is, there's a lot of information about the brain that we don't have yet. We know that children with psychiatric disorders have a chemical imbalance in the brain that is caused by a genetic abnormality, but we don't know what the abnormality is" (p. 55).

## Neurobiological Disorders: Three Examples

Research into the prevalence of neurobiological disorders suggests that some types of disorders tend to occur together in children. When this happens, the child is said to have comorbid conditions: in other words, s/he has two (or more) NBD's.

**Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)** has received much attention among school practitioners in the past ten years. Children with ADHD have "developmentally inappropriate impulse control and motor activity," while children with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) have "poorly focused attention, disorganization, slow cognitive processing, and decreased fine motor speed" (Dornbush and Pruitt, 1995, p. 3).

Most early childhood professionals have heard about ADHD in the past few years. This disorder has received extensive attention in the media, in research, and in public advocacy for children who suffer from this troubling condition. These children tend to quickly come to the attention of teachers because the particular symptoms of the disorder, such as poor impulse control, clash with the ordinary behavioral expectations of schools and classrooms. An important issue currently being debated in many circles is: When/how do we know if a child really has ADHD? Certainly, the number of children diagnosed with this disorder has risen dramatically in the past few years, and there has been a corresponding increase in the number of children placed on Ritalin, the preferred medication to treat the disorder. Some teachers may wonder if children are being "over-diagnosed" and inappropriately placed on Ritalin. Koplewicz (1996) notes that "According to the most conservative estimate, 3 to 5 percent of all children will have the disorder, and some estimates put it as high as 9 percent" (p. 72-73).

Teachers of children in the primary grades are encouraged to incorporate into their work the wealth of information that has been learned about early childhood development. All primary grade children need, for example, many daily opportunities for movement, social interaction, and creative expression. If a particular child is having difficulty fitting into your classroom and meeting your expectations, your first question should be: Is this child struggling because s/he may have a neurobiological disorder, or is the child struggling because my expectations are inappropriate? Your answer will lead to your next decision: Do I refer him/her for special services, or do I modify my teaching?

**Tourette Syndrome (TS)** is one type of a larger category of tic disorders. Tics are "neurological conditions composed of involuntary movements (motor tics) or sound (vocal tics)" (Dornbush and Pruitt, 1995, p. 8). Educators may associate tic disorders only with the more dramatic symptoms of making obscene gestures (Copropraxia) or uttering obscene words (Coprolalia). In fact, in the school setting teachers are more likely to encounter children who exhibit a wider variety of symptoms. For example, a child with a tic disorder may be observed repeatedly making one particular movement, such as tightening facial muscles, blinking, scratching, or arm/leg motions. Other children may exhibit repeated vocal symptoms, such as coughing/throat clearing, making sounds, or repeating syllables/short words.

**Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)** is "characterized by involuntary, recurrent obsessions and compulsions that consume time, provoke anxiety, and interfere with normal school functioning. Obsessions are persistent thoughts, images, ideas, or feelings that enter the student's thinking and are experienced as unreasonable, meaningless, and excessive. Compulsions are repetitive, ritualistic behaviors that are usually associated with an obsession and are performed to relieve the tension and anxiety associated with the obsession" (Dornbush and Pruitt, 1995, p. 13). In school, children with OCD may appear to be daydreaming when they are in fact "stuck" in their mind, attending to a thought or image that consumes attention and creates intense anxiety. Children with compulsions can be seen repeatedly performing a certain action, such as tapping the desk or washing their hands, writing and rewriting sentences, and/or erasing their paper to start over.

Medication is often prescribed for a child suffering from a neurobiological brain disorder. For some children (and their parents) the decision about whether or not to use medication is a difficult one because in our society there is considerable stigma attached to the use of medication to treat a mental disorder. Decisions about medication can, and should, be made only by qualified physicians. Recognizing that all of these disorders are difficult to diagnose and treat, children, parents, and teachers should do everything possible to provide accurate and detailed information to the doctor. Teachers and administrators are encouraged to act as supportive allies in the daily management of a child's symptoms. It is natural for a caring educator to be concerned about a child taking medication. However, a prudent response is for a teacher to maintain a position of support and understanding regarding any medicine prescribed for either a mental or physical disorder.

### How Teachers Can Help

As stated previously, the early childhood teacher can play an extremely important role in the life of any child. If that child happens to have a neurobiological brain disorder (NBD), then the potential impact of the teacher is heightened—for better or worse. Teachers must remember that every behavior has a reason behind it, and for children with NBD's that reason is completely beyond their control. Of course, teachers should not be expected to establish a completely different set of expectations for children with NBD's; however, a teacher can make appropriate modifications in the regular classroom environment that may significantly improve the likelihood of a child's academic success, social growth, and identity development.

On determining how to enhance the school experience of a child with an NBD, you should begin by doing what you do with any child; namely, getting to know the child in considerable depth. Central to this process is the establishment of a genuine and trusting relationship with each individual child. This is the teacher's first and most important task, for it is upon this relationship that subsequent teaching and learning is based. Remember, a child with an NBD will come to school with five years of difficult, distressing, and possibly defeating life experience. These children DO NOT need school-based experiences with adults and children who will make their lives more difficult than they already are.

Once a relationship is firmly in place, you can proceed with planning and implementing an education that is most appropriate for the child. Although specific practices will be dependent on the unique factors and need of each child, teacher, and classroom group, the following features of regular education should be reviewed and modified as appropriate:

- **Identification and Referral:** Many children with an NBD will come to school without having been previously diagnosed. Some disorders have symptoms that can be hidden, and school personnel are vital links in the identification and referral process (Adams and Torchia, 1996). It is important that you recognize your own skills in observing and evaluating children's behavior and development. A child with an NBD may have symptoms that range along a continuum from mild to severe. If you are concerned about a child and suspect that s/he may have a neurobiological disorder, do not hesitate to consult with the appropriate school personnel.
- **The Physical Environment:** Some children may need certain seating arrangements in the classroom in order to optimize their ability to attend and learn.

- **Classroom Routines:** Review how your classroom functions (rules, expectations, etc.) and decide if a child needs any exceptions to the typical way things operate.
- **Curriculum:** Study the curriculum you use in the school and decide if it is appropriate for the child, or should it be modified in order to make it more meaningful/manageable?
- **Instruction:** How can you provide instructional experiences for the child that are more suitable and take into account the particular obstacles to learning created by the neurobiological disorder?
- **Social Development:** This extremely important aspect of classroom life is an area for which a child with an NBD will probably need extra help and guidance from the teacher. These children will come to school already feeling different from other children and may suffer from high levels of shame and guilt, because the symptoms of their disorders are so socially unacceptable. The child will need you as a trusted ally and will look to you for help in learning how to interact with other children.

All children are unique individuals who want and need positive, nurturing, and satisfying experiences in school. Although many children with no-fault brain disorders come to school at a distinct disadvantage, the individual classroom teacher can offer much in the way of help and hope to the child and his/her family. David Comings emphasizes this point when he states that "I have had many hundreds of parents tell me that their child had a 'good year' when they had a teacher who understood their disorder and was willing to be flexible and use innovative approaches to help the child and had a 'horrible year' when this was not the case...An understanding teacher and an appropriately designed educational plan is a critical part of treating all of these children" (cited in Dornbush and Pruitt, 1995, p. i). Early childhood educators have a special place in the life and development of a child with a neurobiological disorder. Because this child is in your classroom, you have a unique opportunity to bring hope for his/her future.

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# SYMMETRIC TONIC NECK REFLEX

Some children who squirm, sit inappropriately, get up frequently, lose attention quickly, daydream, write poorly and laboriously, reverse letters, and move clumsily are misdiagnosed as being hyperactive, or having ADD or ADHD. Research indicates some children experience behavioral and academic difficulties because of an immature **symmetric tonic neck reflex** (STNR). STNR occurs naturally in the normal development of children during the sixth to eighth month of the infant's life and matures if the child crawls enough and properly. If this reflex stays at an immature level, it can interfere with coordination tasks. Essentially, the three body units—neck, arms, and legs—are "tied together" by the reflex, so that movement in one area automatically produces a change in the muscular tension of the other two areas. The immature reflex controls muscular tension in the child's arms and legs in relation to the head movements. The immature reflex interferes with the postures generally required for reading and writing.

An immature STNR makes it very difficult for the child to sit at a desk in the "correct sitting position," with elbows and hips bent at the same time. Under the influence of the reflex, the neck and elbows want to straighten in opposition to the bending of the legs, and vice versa. Consequently, when the child bends his or her arms to write or hold a book for reading, the legs tend to straighten. Frequently such children sit slouched down with legs stretched out in front of them. Many teachers consider this indicative of laziness and a hindrance to the child's work.

When not allowed to sit in a slouched position, the child with an immature STNR may sit in a chair with feet and legs tucked under them or sit with their feet hooked around the legs of the chair—locking the feet so the arms and neck can bend while the legs are bent. Other common positions assumed by children in order to get comfortable include: straightening the legs by tipping the chair back, laying their heads on their arms while writing, standing beside their desk, lying on the floor with legs straight and elbows bent, or squirming to find a comfortable position.

Many children with an immature STNR are misdiagnosed as hyperactive or as having attention-deficit disorder because of the difficulty demonstrated in sitting still for long periods of time in the "proper sitting position." These children are uncomfortable, and their extreme discomfort has a real, physical basis. They get up and sit down repeatedly in order to relieve the tension caused by the reflex. An immature STNR can cause poor penmanship, and copying from the board is a difficult task because the child continually must change the position of the neck and arms. Paying attention may become difficult; very little energy is left for listening and doing work. These children use at least *ten times* as much energy as do children without these problems because of the extra effort in trying to complete tasks, yet they are often referred to as lazy or lacking in motivation because they don't finish their work.

Teachers and parents should always examine all avenues before 'diagnosing' a child's behavior. STNR is just one way some children can be correctly diagnosed who appear to be hyperactive. For more information concerning Symmetric Tonic Neck Reflex see *Stopping Hyperactivity: A New Solution* by Nancy E. O'Dell and Patricia A. Cook, (1997, Avery Publishing Group).

# early years are learning years

## Time out for "time-out"

The purpose of discipline for young children is to teach coping skills and discourage inappropriate behavior. "Time-out" is not a first choice, but a last resort technique for a child who is harming another or in danger of harming herself. Used infrequently and for very brief periods (no longer than two or three minutes), time-out may give a child the opportunity to calm down and cool off after a frustrating situation. Used often or inappropriately, time-out may not only be ineffectual—it may be damaging to the child.

The early years are a time for children to develop confidence and self-control. When adults create environments that respect each individual child, they set forth a message that the world is a warm, friendly learning place. Positive discipline techniques that combine caring and direction are a part of this healthy environment. Adults should look for meaningful ways to show children why harmful and aggressive acts are unacceptable.

### Before you give a child time-out, make sure of the following:

- **Adults avoid using time-out for infants and toddlers.** Very young children should not be isolated, nor should they be ignored or left without proper stimulation. Infants or young toddlers who do not understand why their behavior is unacceptable should gently be directed to more acceptable behaviors or activities.

- **Your expectations of a child's behavior are realistic.** A general knowledge of child development will help you identify when children are merely experimenting with their boundaries and when they are behaving inappropriately. When adults give children realistic goals, children feel good about themselves and are more likely to cope successfully with stressful situations.

- **Consequences immediately follow the child's behavior.** When children experience immediate repercussions for harming others, they understand more clearly why we are disciplining them. Whenever possible, adults should offer children positive alternatives to their actions (asking a child to help rebuild a block structure she has knocked down is more productive than removing her from the area entirely).

- **Time-out should not be humiliating, nor should it make children feel threatened or afraid.** There should not be a special chair or area assigned for time-out—this reinforces the idea that time-out is a punishment and may cause undue anxiety. Adults should never make a child feel ridiculed or isolated during time-out periods.

- **The child should not be left alone, unless he wants to be.** Young children need adults' support to work out their feelings. If adults show children that their feelings count, they will be more likely to respect the feelings of others. A caregiver should always visually observe a child during a time-out period.

- **Time out does not last longer than it takes for the child to calm down.** After the child calms down, explain clearly what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior. There should be no ambiguity about why we have disciplined the child, otherwise the child is more likely to repeat the undesirable behavior.

- **The child feels safe with the knowledge that people care for her.** Remember that children imitate adults' behavior. Screaming, hitting, or ridiculing a child for bad behavior is not an effective way to teach self-control.

- **Tailor the method of discipline to the individual child.** Children develop their abilities to control themselves at different rates. Take into consideration the needs of the particular child involved. No single technique will work with every child every time.

- **Time-out is not used as a punishment.** Time-out is an opportunity for a child to clear her mind and rejoin the group or activity in a more productive state. Teach a child how to solve her own problems with love and support, and time-out may no longer be necessary.

**Additional Resources:**

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**naeyc** NATIONAL ASSOCIATION for the EDUCATION of YOUNG CHILDREN, 1509 16th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036-1426
202-232-8777, 800-424-2460, FAX: 202-328-1846

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# III. Organizing the Classroom Schedule

## TELLING TIME

*Mimi Brodsky Chenfeld*

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***Sometimes, Ms. Chenfeld reminds us, those incidental, in-between, hang-loose, unstructured, spontaneous times together are our best times in the classroom.***

Hurrying through the halls to the kindergarten room for my next "Artists-in-the Schools" session, I heard calypso rhythms wafting through the closed door. I knocked, but no one answered, so I just went in.

"Day-O!" Pulsing steel drums and the bouncy lyrics of the "Banana Boat Song" filled the air as swaying children glided and danced around the room - singing along, twirling and stepping, smiling and improvising. I immediately set down my own records, tambourine, and puppet and joined their dance. When the song was over, we clapped and hugged. Shiny faces greeted me. I looked around for the teacher and spotted her still sitting at her desk putting papers away.

"Such fun," I grinned. "What's going on?"

"Oh, we were just killing time," she answered.

Old trooper that I am, I plunged right into my hour with the kindergartners. Still soaring and delighted from the joy of the "Banana Boat Song," we continued moving, singing, playing, dancing and telling stories. But something was chipping away at the happiness I felt over being with the children. The words "killing time" gnawed at my spirit.

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If we could interview each and every child in that class, I would bet my life that every one of them would immediately state that the best part of the day, perhaps the best part of the school year thus far, was the precious few minutes of singing and dancing together. Yet, without malice or hurtful intentions and without conscious negativism, their teacher described the obviously happy activity as "killing time."

In those few minutes, so much happened and so many skills were called on: total participation and cooperation, freedom of expression, oral language, reviewing information (the lyrics, which everyone already knew), rhythm, small and gross motor skills, listening skills, multicultural education, sequential learning, patterning, verbal skills, respecting the space of others, repetition, and - most important-enjoyment.

Think for a moment about your own school experiences. Think about those few minutes before a guest arrives at your classroom door, when you and the children are exchanging ideas, anticipating, wondering what the person will be like, wondering how the visit will go, suggesting questions to ask. Do you consider that to be killing time? Perhaps those moments are "peak times"?

Consider the song sung together in the few minutes before the bell rings for assembly; the anecdotes children share before daily morning exercises officially begin; the complicated hand/clap/rap/chant song the children teach each other in the few minutes of "free time" between getting drinks and the math lesson;

the drawing, writing, sharing, talking, and joking time after lunch on a rainy day when outside recess is called off. Killing time or peak time?

Here are some times to record in your journal and imprint on your memory:

- Pnina standing against the classroom wall, sun shining on her back, explaining, "I love my shadow";
- Len playing the hokey-pokey on his "violin" in those few seconds before the story begins;
- Ben bringing in the bird's nest his grandpa found - even though it wasn't "Sharing Day";
- Antonio calling his classmates to the window to see the rarely seen white squirrel, just as "quiet time" is over and "reading groups" begin - "It looks like a ghost squirrel," observes Dylan with wide wonder in his eyes;
- Callie and Chloe at Table 1 counting the little stones Callie keeps in her jacket pocket, during the waiting time before attendance is called; and
- kindergartners joyful together, dancing and swirling to the "Banana Boat Song" before the "Artist in the School" arrives.

Killing time? Peak time? Prime time? Hallowed time?

Sometimes those incidental, in-between, hang-loose, unstructured, spontaneous times together are our best times. Perhaps those times will be remembered longest and with the most fondness by the children (and by ourselves).

Right now, on this Day-O, what time is it in your classroom? How do you tell your time?

# TEACHING IN AN ALL DAY KINDERGARTEN

**Teacher Story**

*Kathy Politz*
*Warren Elementary, Terre Haute*

*(Kathy Politz has been named Indiana Teacher of the Year, 2000.)*

Having taught an all day kindergarten program for the last ten years, I am often asked, "How do you like the all day program?" My response is a quick one, "I love it!" Then comes the next question, "What does an all day kindergarten look like?" This response takes more thought and time.

Actually, at first glance, the all day kindergarten looks like any program for young children. The all day program provides an environment which allows the learner to . . .

- engage in meaningful tasks.
- take ownership and responsibility for his/her learning and choices.
- be a problem solver and a decision maker.
- learn at one's own pace.

What does this mean for an all day kindergarten program? It means that the focus of the program has to be on reality and action: on doing and creating. It means an appropriate program which gives children a chance to use their hands, to take risks, to solve problems, and to make their own discoveries.

While there are several obvious variations between a half day and an all day kindergarten, I have found the differences to be advantageous for the children and the families. The all day program allows for **TIME**. I once read, "childhood is a journey, not a race." The extra time gained in an all day program supports this journey. The extended day allows time for . . .

- expanded activities and a variety of daily activities.
- children to explore, manipulate, and construct at their own pace.
- teachers to encourage, facilitate, observe, and interact with more children each day.
- parent involvement during the school day, as well as after the school day.
- opportunities to link with community resources.
- all to feel less "rushed" so that the focus becomes the journey, not the race.

Second, and just as important, the all day program makes **smaller student/teacher ratio a reality** while easing the challenges of establishing a home/school connection. What better way to address the needs of the whole child (social, emotional, physical, and cognitive), to become better acquainted with each student and his/her family, and to build a community of learners. There is a high correlation between school success and motivation to achieve. Schools must nurture this desire to learn. More time and smaller student/teacher ratios can support such a disposition.

Educators know that one must not risk denying children the opportunity to know how to communicate, to solve problems, to work cooperatively, and to be flexible and confident in adapting to change. Are you ready for such a challenge, the challenge of change? I love it!

**Teacher Story**

# A DAY IN A THIRD GRADE CLASSROOM

*Marolyn Krauss*
*Horizon Elementary, Granger*

We begin every day in our classroom with partner reading. During this time, children select what they want to read with a partner or independently. I take this opportunity to read with a different child for about 15-20 minutes. This also provides me with many kidwatching notes regarding the life of a child as a reader. Reading becomes a social experience that involves the construction of meaning. The reader is supported in the reading process when he can share with other readers. After this reading time, the class takes care of attendance, messages, homework, etc.

Morning news and the Pledge are broadcast live from our school newsroom. We then have our class meeting/community circle time where we discuss our daily schedule and set our plan of action for the day's learning experiences. Often times we include a review of our lifelong guidelines and give some reminders to be responsible citizens in our learning community and elsewhere. Learners take ownership and responsibility in the democratic process.

Following the class meeting, the children have the opportunity to write a message on the dry- erase board. The class uses this message as a source of daily oral/written language, discussion, geography, junior editing (for grammar, spelling, mechanics, punctuation, etc.), vocabulary, and other connections. The students' questions about the written message generate ideas for discussion. This meaningful experience uses the children's own language and provides a brain compatible experience.

Also, during this class meeting, good quality literature is read aloud to the children. The focus is on enjoyment, discussion, and thoughts about the author's message. The read-aloud selections generally relate to a topic or concept that we are currently exploring. Novels are integrated with the content areas as much as possible. The children may choose to create meaning by drawing illustrations in their sketch pads. Pictures might be about what the story meant to them, a connection, or their own interpretation of the story. The emphasis is on using their visual/spatial intelligence to create meaning and to stretch their thinking and understanding. Next, volunteers share a variety of interpretations of the story.

The children have books entitled, *WORDS I USE WHEN I WRITE, READ, AND THINK!* The children are very aware of words in our English language and, by recording them in their books, they become word collectors. In each book is an ABC list of frequently used words and spaces to add new words. This book is very functional and used during writer's workshop, literature circles, and learning clubs. There is also a class word book in a three-ring binder with ABC index tabs. The students can nominate words, give reasons to support their choices, and enter the new words in the class book for use by everyone.

During Literature Circles, we use multiple copies of books and text sets. Generally, the books are related to the current topic or concept of study. Children select a book that interests them and form literature circles with other students selecting the same title. As a group, they write an action plan, decide how to approach the book, read and discuss, take notes on index cards or in learning logs, and keep track of new vocabulary, questions, comments, etc. Reading and talking about literature gives readers time to explore half-formed ideas, to expand their understanding of literature through hearing other interpretations, and to become readers who read strategically and think critically and deeply about what they read. Discussions are open-ended with the focus on bringing the literature and readers together. The readers ponder, wonder, and think. Each child is responsible for keeping track of the books and authors he reads on a reading record card. This record sheet is kept in the working portfolio with the learning log. A learning log is used to keep an ongoing record of the thinking process in science, social studies, and literature.

During Writer's Workshop, emphasis is on thinking like an author. Each child is gaining a better understanding of the writing process and the authoring cycle. All drafts are written in a writer's notebook. Various stages of the authoring cycle include choosing a topic, gathering and collecting information and pictures, drafting, sharing in the author's circle, revising, editing, and publishing. Each individual child's language usage, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, spelling, style, and author's voice are addressed throughout this process. Assistance is provided where it is developmentally appropriate. The learner sees himself as a writer and reflects on his progress. (It is hard to envision a day without writer's workshop time.) If the child decides to publish a story, he goes to the classroom publishing center and creates his book. There are many bookmaking ideas in the center from which the child may choose. When it is time to share a published book, the child sits in the author's chair and reads his story to the other class members. Afterwards, kind questions, comments, connections, and compliments are given to the young author. This is a picture perfect moment, so I always have my camera available!

Every afternoon for about twenty minutes, we have D.E.A.R. (*Drop Everything And Read*) time. Often "book talks" are given by several kids after this silent reading time. The children sharing also rate the book and give a reason to support their rating.

Following D.E.A.R., we have Math Workshop. After topics are explored together as a class, the students are encouraged to investigate the topics further. These investigations involve students in the collection, recording, and evaluation of data with a presentation of their findings to the class. These are small group investigations that support students in their explorations as mathematicians.

Timing is everything and your timing will be off if you are not "watching" the kids. They will let you know if something is not working, or if they are ready to forge ahead. You will make adjustments all year long based on your kidwatching notes. As I was watching my students recently after our lunch recess, I noticed that they were rushing through their personal journal entries. We had begun the year by writing after lunch. As new third graders to our side of the building, the students were experiencing many difficulties at recess. Writing time gave them an opportunity to put those experiences in writing to share or refer to later. By December, however, the students were rushing through their entries, still writing about recess, and giving very little thought to what they were writing. Some common entries were "We went outside for recess today" or "I played soccer and scored a goal." The students and I discussed this problem and decided to switch our writing to morning before community circle. The students found they had a lot to write about that they wanted to share with others in community circle. The writing became purposeful and meaningful again. I found the entries were longer, more thoughtful, and certainly more interesting. Timing—you adjust all year long and do what works. Sometimes what works one year will not work with the next year's students. Did I mention **flexibility**??????

**Teacher Story**

# A DAY IN A MULTI-AGE CLASSROOM

*Becky Lane*
*Center for Inquiry (IPS School # 92), Indianapolis*

"That's an unusual combination," is a typical response to a kindergarten/first grade multi-age class. They wonder how the day is structured and how the various skills and levels are addressed. If the curriculum was based on fill-in-the-blank activities, or everyone was expected to work at the same level, it would be a frustrating classroom instead of a successful one. On the other hand, the open-ended experiences and activities lead to students working at their own level and wonderful peer collaboration. In many multi-age programs, students stay with a teacher for more than one year which allows the teacher to gain a better understanding of each child.

Every classroom, even those with one traditional grade level, contains children with a wide variety of skills and abilities. A successful classroom is based on the belief that children learn at their own rate, they learn from each other, and they learn by doing. A multi-age classroom provides a more natural setting to do that learning: one that is more representative of the outside world. The teacher needs to understand stages of development and know the students so individual expectations are expressed. The following is a typical day in one multi-age classroom.

Each morning after greeting each other and putting away their coats, the children begin writing. This may be done individually or in groups of two or three. Students have freedom to write about anything in their notebooks and often write about something interesting that happened to them the day before. Each student writes in his or her own notebook, even when writing collaboratively.

The teacher circulates, asking children to read their work, asking questions to bring out details, and making suggestions. Teacher expectations are based on the ability of the individual. Many times a younger child is writing better than an older one, but the emphasis is on each child improving his or her own writing, not in comparing students.

Later in the day, the students have an opportunity to share their journal writing with the class. Classmates are encouraged to make positive comments and to ask questions for clarification if they haven't understood something. For example, if a student has written, "I went shopping with him last night," a classmate might ask, "Who were you with?" This process is a natural way for students to edit their work and see the need for being specific in their writing. The teacher also may ask questions, but the goal is to help the students think about each other's writing.

Group sharing time is a good opportunity to have one of the many discussions about doing your individual best. Students quickly see that classmates have strengths in different areas and will ask opinions and help from those with a certain strength. Grade levels are never emphasized; in fact, they seldom are mentioned.

Most of the morning is spent with language arts activities. Each day, students read a book and respond in writing. The children's writing notebooks and literature logs are separate; the literature log reserved for responses to literature. Often a book is read together as a group the first time. Children may also choose to read a book of their choice independently or with a partner. For many days, the students have an opportunity to respond to a book with artwork, puppets, drama, or music in invitation form.

Responses in the literature logs are sometimes teacher-directed if there has been some direct teaching about a skill. Other times, the students have the freedom to write any entry related to the writing. Some of the choices include: what happened at the beginning, middle, and end of the story; relating a similar experience they have had; writing about their favorite part, and explaining why they chose it; or choosing a character to describe. Even at the earliest ages, students are expected to support their opinions. Again the teacher asks pointed questions of individuals, based on the strengths and needs of each student. Children are expected to reread for meaning, make necessary corrections, and then make a final check for conventions such as end punctuation and capital letters.

On most days, the entire class has a mini-lesson on a skill which the teacher has noticed the class needs to practice. This mini-lesson often comes directly from the children's writing and the teacher's knowledge of the progression of skills children develop.

The children love to have their work put on the overhead to use for editing in a mini-lesson. For example, a first grader was writing a lot, but her writing consisted of many sentences connected by 'and'. The teacher put her story on the overhead, and the child read it out loud to the class. After discussing the many strengths, the teacher reread the story without taking any breaths. During this reading, the child immediately saw the need for periods and the removal of the 'ands'. The class reread the story after editing and agreed it was improved. When circulating during writing the following days, the teacher saw many students checking their work for run-on sentences.

Immediately after lunch, the class has rest and reading time. This time allows for the differences in physical needs of primary students. The children may choose to take a rest, read independently, or read quietly with a partner. Stronger students often read to emergent readers in a natural helping experience. Books are chosen by the children based on interest.

After rest and reading, the class has about an hour of math. The period usually begins with a group time of counting games and/or the introduction of a new activity or skill. Then students work at stations with a variety of materials. Although the materials may be different, the basic activities are similar such as grouping or patterning. The same general guidelines are in place all year for the stations: (1) no more than four students at a station, and (2) materials must be put away when finished. During this activity time, the teacher often pulls small groups together to work on specific skills. The groups are always changing and not determined by age but by skill and need.

The class is usually involved in a study that combines science and social studies and includes the use of many language arts and math skills. At the beginning of a study, the class meets as a whole to create a KWL chart listing what is known and what questions they have about the subject. This chart is constantly edited and revised and is referred to throughout the study. This time of the day often includes invitations about the study. Classroom projects also include murals and cooking. These open-ended activities involve children of all ages and stages of development.

Each day also includes time to have free choice of a variety of activities including blocks, art materials, dress-up clothes, and puzzles. The day usually ends at the carpet with the reading of a good book and a short discussion of the day's activities.

# ORGANIZING THE CLASSROOM SCHEDULE

An appropriate schedule is based on an understanding of child development and the specific needs of a particular group of children. Predictable schedules and clearly understood routines help children to feel safe, and become independent, confident workers in the classroom. A balanced schedule for young children offers time for active and quiet experiences, independent, large group and small group activities, indoor and outdoor play times, and child-initiated and teacher-directed activities. Young children benefit from having informal, social times during which they can make independent choices.

In planning the routines in the classroom, the teacher needs to think about all the things that are expected of the children in order for them to work with increasing independence. Each day should begin with the community of learners discussing and planning the events and activities for the day. Plans and the day's agenda can be recorded for all to see. The schedule will likely include small group and individual learning experiences, large group activities, outdoor activities, special classes, free choice times, quiet reading times, writing, rest times, and reflection and sharing at the end of the day. Planning with the children assists them in setting goals and becoming responsible for their own learning. It also familiarizes them with new materials that are available in the classroom.

Teachers need to provide large blocks of time so that children have opportunities to investigate and discover. It is recommended that at least one or two times during the week there are uninterrupted periods during which children can work on projects. Writing and reading workshops can be scheduled in large blocks of time that allow on-going activities to take place. They often begin with a group meeting where the teacher introduces something new to the children. The children can also work independently or in small groups in learning centers or invitations. This time gives the teacher an opportunity to work with small groups and individuals and to observe the children's progress.

Even though consistency is an important characteristic of the daily schedule, flexibility is also essential in any schedule. It may be necessary to change the routine to accommodate special activities, such as a school puppet show, an unplanned visitor, or unusual weather conditions. The routine needs to also be flexible in order to accommodate unexpected opportunities that arise which have the potential for becoming excellent learning opportunities. For example, a butterfly fluttering into the room during story time is sure to arouse some excitement and curiosity. Time should be taken to observe and respond to children's questions. Perhaps a few children will want to go to the library for books to find out about butterflies and identify the specific butterfly that visited the classroom. In addition to learning about butterflies, the children are practicing their skills in collecting data, developing a sense of responsibility for their own learning, becoming more aware of their own learning, and increasing their awareness of the surrounding world.

An effective schedule is one that allows for both predictability and variety but is also realistic. In order for children to become increasingly independent, it is a good idea to schedule some activities at the same time each day. The fixed times provide consistency for the children. There are also the times that are part of the school's schedule: arrival and departure times, mealtimes, special classes, and recess.

The teacher should create a classroom climate that fosters the cognitive development of students by providing and structuring the time necessary to explore and wrestle with meaningful ideas and problems. A teacher who is well versed in a variety of approaches can create a schedule that engages her students physically and cognitively.

On the following pages are sample schedules from a variety of classrooms and levels. These represent samples of a "day" in these classrooms. A schedule representing one day will not include all activities and routines in which students are involved. In working to create a balanced curriculum, teachers may integrate the ideas presented into a schedule that accommodates their own individual and group needs.

## A Sample Day in a Full-Day Preschool

| | |
|---|---|
| 8:45-9:00 | **Arrival**<br>Children select quiet activities set out on tables, such as puzzles, clay, or drawing. |
| 9:00-9:15 | **Morning Meeting**<br>The teacher brings the group together for songs, discussion of the day's activities, planning work time, and sharing. |
| 9:15-10:30 | **Work Time**<br>Children choose from activities in the interest/learning centers. |
| 10:30-10:45 | **Clean-Up**<br>Children put away toys and materials, use the restroom, and help set tables for a snack. |
| 10:45-11:00 | **Snack** |
| 11:00-11:15 | **Circle Time**<br>The teacher brings the group together to discuss the work time or for a music and movement activity or a story. |
| 11:15-11:50 | **Outdoor Play**<br>Children select from a variety of activities in interest areas outdoors. |
| 11:50-Noon | **Preparation for Lunch or Going Home**<br>Children wash hands and help set the tables. In half-day programs, children prepare to leave. |
| Noon-12:30 | **Lunch and Clean-up** |
| 12:30-12:45 | **Story Time**<br>The teacher reads to the children. |
| 12:45-1:45 | **Rest Time** |
| 1:45-2:15 | **Quiet Work Time**<br>Children select from a variety of choices requiring minimal clean-up, such as playing with table toys, drawing, writing, reading books, and going to the listening center. |
| 2:15-2:30 | **Clean-Up**<br>As children finish putting materials away, teachers gather them for story time. |
| 2:30-3:00 | **Story Time and Dismissal** |

## A Sample Day in a Special Needs Full-Day Preschool

| | |
|---|---|
| 8:50-9:40 | **Breakfast and Morning Madness**<br>As children finish breakfast, they can move from eating to learning areas. Objectives for each area are posted. |
| 9:40-10:10 | **Creative Movement**<br>The whole group participates in a creative movement activity. |
| 10:10-10:30 | **Circle Time**<br>This includes conversation and sharing time. The length of time depends on the ages of children and attention span. |
| 10:30-11:05 | **Free Play**<br>Children can select from interest areas: art, books, toys, blocks, house, sand and water, drama, etc. |
| 11:05-11:35 | **Lunch** |
| 11:40-12:00 | **Quiet Activity Time**<br>A story or quiet music helps the group prepare for rest time. |
| 12:00-1:30 | **Rest Time and Choice Time**<br>As children finish rest time, they may choose quiet games, books, toys, or other quiet activities. |
| 1:30-2:20 | **Group Exploration Activities** |
| 2:20-2:50 | **Activity and Snack** |
| 2:50-3:20 | **Free Play (outdoor or gym)**<br>Children can choose from assorted activities such as climbing, movement, games, etc. |
| 3:20-3:40 | **Get ready to go home and Dismissal** |

# A Sample Day in a Half-Day Kindergarten

| | |
|---|---|
| 8:30-9:00 | **Arrival**<br>Because the children arrive at varying times, they are asked to sign-in and begin writing in their notebooks. When the writing is completed, they share it with an adult, then read a book or participate in another literacy activity (listening station, alphabet games, etc.) |
| 9:00-9:15 | **Calendar/Daily Message**<br>The teacher brings the group together on the rug. The calendar utilizes many math concepts. A daily message is written on the dry-erase board and utilizes many language skills. |
| 9:15-9:30 | **Shared Reading**<br>This time is expanded as the year progresses. |
| 9:30-10:00 | **Centers**<br>Children choose from a variety of activities including blocks, sand, art, woodworking, computers, manipulatives, and activities related to a thematic study. (As children become more independent, the teacher can work with small groups on a specific task.) |
| 10:00-10:10 | **Clean-up**<br>The teacher gives a five-minute warning and plays "clean-up" music. |
| 10:10-10:25 | **Music** |
| 10:25-10:45 | **Outdoor Play**<br>Children can select a variety of outdoor activities (climbing, balls, hoops, games, etc.) |
| 10:45-11:05 | **Thematic study or Math focus**<br>During this time, the teacher can introduce a math skill, manipulative, or activity for a learning center, or students can work on activities related to a theme. The teacher can also use this time to continue activities from the morning. |
| 11:05-11:15 | **Story Time/Reflection** |
| 11:15 | **Dismissal** |

# A Sample Day in a Full-Day Kindergarten

| | |
|---|---|
| 8:30-8:45 | **Arrival/Morning Business** |
| 8:45-9:15 | **Breakfast** |
| 9:15-9:30 | **Morning Meeting/Calendar**<br>The class meets on the carpet and discusses the day. The calendar utilizes many math skills. A discussion of the schedule and the goals for the day takes place in the group. |
| 9:30-10:00 | **Muscle Room or Outdoor Play**<br>Children have an opportunity to develop gross motor skills with exercises and a variety of equipment. |
| 10:00-11:00 | **Free Choice**<br>Children have free choice in many areas: art, blocks, library, housekeeping, sand, water, toys, drama, etc. |
| 11:00-11:45 | **Reader's and Writer's Choice**<br>Children are given the opportunity to read and discuss books with partners or in groups. They may also choose to write, share, publish, and illustrate their own stories and/or books. |
| 11:45-12:00 | **Clean-up/Wash Hands** |
| 12:00-1:00 | **Lunch/Outdoor Play** |
| 1:00-1:15 | **Story Time**<br>The teacher reads a story to the class. |
| 1:15-2:00 | **Quiet Time**<br>Some of the children may nap at this time; others may read, write, or play quietly. |
| 2:00-2:30 | **Special Class**<br>Music, art, or library |
| 2:30-3:15 | **Integrated Studies**<br>Children participate in projects and thematic studies using centers, the writing process, library skills, and by incorporating math, language arts, physical education, social studies, science, fine arts, and responsible living. The areas of study are based on the children's knowledge and their questions. |
| 3:15-3:30 | **Clean-up, Reflection Group**<br>After clean-up, the class meets on the carpet to discuss and reflect on the day's events. "What did we learn today?" "What are we still wondering about?" |
| 3:30 | **Dismissal** |

## A Sample Day in a K-1 Multi-Age Classroom

| | |
|---|---|
| 8:30-9:00 | **Greeting**<br>**Writing**<br>Children may write individually or in groups. They have the freedom to write about anything they choose. The teacher circulates, asks questions, and listens to their stories. |
| 9:00-9:30 | **Group sharing**<br>Students can share their writing with classmates. Positive comments and questions are encouraged. Students can edit or add to work to make it clearer to the reader. |
| 9:30-11:30 | **Language Arts**<br>**Reading**<br>Children read a book alone, with a partner, or in a group.<br>**Literature Logs**<br>Responses in the log may pertain to a particular skill. Students may write a free response to reading: explain what happened at the beginning, middle, and at the end of the story; relate the story to a personal experience; write about their favorite part; or describe a character. Students are expected to support opinions with facts and reasons.<br>**Author's Circle/Editor's Table**<br>**Invitations**<br>Children have the opportunity to respond to the reading with artwork, puppets, drama, music, etc. in invitation form.<br>**Mini-lesson**<br>The teacher conducts a focus lesson with the whole class or small group on a skill that needs to be introduced or practiced. |
| 11:30-12:30 | **Lunch/Recess** |
| 12:30-1:00 | **Reading or Rest**<br>This time allows for differences in physical needs. Children may rest (or sleep) or read silently or quietly with a partner. |
| 1:00-2:00 | **Math**<br>This period usually begins with a group time of counting games or introduction of a new activity or skill. Students then work at stations with a variety of materials involving concepts such as grouping or patterning. During this time, the teacher can work on skills with small groups. |
| 2:00-2:45 | **Social Studies/Science**<br>A study is usually in conjunction with language arts and/or math skills. Teacher begins with a KWL chart to determine questions for study. This time includes invitations about the area of study: writing, art work, reading, etc. |
| 2:45-3:15 | **Free Choice**<br>Children may choose from a variety of activities including blocks, art materials, dress-up clothes, puzzles, etc. |
| 3:15-3:30 | **Clean-up, Circle, Dismissal** |

# A Sample Day in a First Grade Classroom

| | |
|---|---|
| 8:30-8:40 | **Arrival**<br>Attendance, lunch count |
| 8:40-9:10 | **Settling-In Time**<br>Children check a list of things to do to get ready for the day. Included are both required activities and optional choices. Children may also have informal conversations with each other and with their teacher, read a book, or work on their writing. |
| 9:10-9:40 | **Group Time**<br>This time includes shared reading of songs, poems, books. There is time to discuss the schedule for the day and community circle. |
| 9:40-10:40 | **Writer's Workshop**<br>Children work on free or guided writing during this time. The teacher may work with small groups or individuals. |
| 10:40-10:50 | **Clean-up for Lunch** |
| 10:50-11:40 | **Lunch and Outdoor Play** |
| 11:40-12:40 | **Project Time**<br>Social Studies and/or Science activities may tie in with a unit of study. |
| 12:40-1:30 | **Reading Workshop**<br>Children may be working in literature circles or reading individually. Book talks and responses to reading using a variety of forms are worked on at this time. |
| 1:30-1:50 | **Recess/Snack** |
| 1:50-2:25 | **Reading**<br>Children have time to read books of interest individually or with a partner. |
| 2:25-3:15 | **Math**<br>Children have the opportunity for hands-on explorations of math concepts. |
| 3:15-3:25 | **Clean-up and Dismissal** |

## A Sample Day in a Second Grade Classroom

8:30-9:15 **Morning Invitations**
Students are free to explore different areas (blocks, science and math, reading and writing, art, etc.). Morning jobs are done (attendance, lunch count). Students sign up for Message Board. The student will share a message and the class will help edit it.

9:15-9:45 **Class Meeting**
The class meets to discuss news, plans for the day, and share learning experiences.

9:45-10:30 **Shared Reading**
This is a whole group activity during which good literature is shared and used for language and phonetic instruction.

10:30-12:00 **Reading/Writing Workshops**
Many varied activities take place during this time. Children may be working in literature circles or small instruction or assessment groups. Some students will be working on free or guided writing activities that give experience in the writing process. Book talks and sharing of published work can be done during this time.

12:00-1:00 **Lunch/Outdoor Play**

1:00-1:20 **Story Time**
The teacher reads a chapter or two from a novel. A matrix can be used for prediction and discussion.

1:20-2:30 **Math Workshop**
Activities during this time include whole group instruction, small group instruction, cooperative groups, learning games, hands-on practice exercises, and assessment.

2:30-3:10 **Inquiry Workshop**
The students explore theme related activities to increase their knowledge of the natural world, broaden thinking skills, solve problems, and make decisions.

3:10-3:30 **Clean-up, Reflection, and Dismissal**
Students meet to share and discuss the day, acknowledge how students have helped each other, and how they are growing as life-long learners.

## A Sample Day in a Third Grade Classroom

8:30-8:45 **Partner Reading**
Every child is encouraged to read a book of choice with a partner. The teacher reads with a different child every day.

8:45-9:00 **Message Board**
Children write a message, and the class uses it as a source of daily oral/written language, discussion, geography, editing, etc.

9:00-9:05 **Taking Care of Business**
The class takes care of attendance, messages, homework, etc.

9:05-9:35 **Class Meeting**
This includes a discussion of the schedule and review of lifelong goals. Learners take ownership and responsibility in the democratic process.

9:35-10:05 **Literature Circles**
Children select a book that interests them and form literature circles with other students choosing the same title. The group writes the action plan, decides how to approach the book, reads and discusses, takes notes in learning logs, tracks new vocabulary, and records questions and comments. A record of books read is kept in portfolios.

**OR**

**Learning Clubs**
Children explore issues related to chosen topics. In each child's working portfolio is a pocket folder with a learning log to keep ongoing records of the thinking process related to literature, science, and social studies.

10:05-11:05 **Special Classes**
P.E., music, art, or library

11:30-12:30 **Lunch/Recess**

12:30-1:00 **D.E.A.R.**
Drop everything and read. Children have free reading time. Often "book talks" are given by children after silent reading.

1:00-1:50 **Math Workshop**
Children use the investigative process to explore a math component involving small group collection, recording and evaluation of data, and a presentation of findings to the class.

1:50-3:00 **Writer's Workshop**
Children's work with the authoring cycle includes choosing a topic, gathering and collecting information and pictures, drafting, sharing in author's circle, revising, editing, and publishing. Assistance is provided where it is developmentally appropriate. Children share a "published" book or piece with class amid questions, comments, connections, and compliments.

3:00-3:15 **Read Aloud**

3:15-3:25 **Community Circle/Dismissal**

# IV. Classroom Climate and Daily Schedules References and Resources

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# DIVERSITY

## *Butterfly in the Wind*

*"A child is a butterfly in the wind.*
*Some can fly better than others,*
*But each one flies*
*The best it can.*
*Why compare one*
*Against the others?*
*Each one is different.*
*Each one is special.*
*Each one is beautiful."*

*Author Unknown*

# DIVERSITY

In this chapter, teachers, parents, and articles from professional books and journals address the many forms of diversity that exist in communities, schools, and classrooms today. This chapter is divided into the following sections:

## I. Cultural Diversity

- ☐ *Teacher Story*- Mei Ying's Story *by Karen Liu*
- ☐ Assessing your Classroom Environment to Promote Cultural Diversity *by Karen Liu*
- ☐ Linguistic and Cultural Diversity—Building on America's Strengths *by NAEYC*
- ☐ Celebrating Holidays in Early Childhood Programs *by NAEYC*

## II. Understanding and Responding to Differences

- ☐ Family Diversity *by Southern Poverty Law Center*
- ☐ Understanding and Responding to Differences
- ☐ Discovering Diversity *by Southern Poverty Law Center*
- ☐ Teaching Young Children to Resist Bias *by NAEYC*

## III. Inclusion of Students With Special Needs

- ☐ *Teacher Story*—Having Adam
- ☐ *Parent Story*—Jenny's Success
- ☐ *Teacher Story*—Inclusion in a Third Grade Classroom
- ☐ Inclusion of Students with Special Needs
- ☐ The Benefits of an Inclusive Education: Making it Work *by NAEYC*
- ☐ Integrating Children with Disabilities into Preschool *by Karen E. Diamond, Linda L.Hestenes, and Caryn O'Connor*
- ☐ *Teacher Story*—Diverse Ways of Thinking and Learning *by Cindy Creek*
- ☐ Gifted Children
- ☐ Nurturing Giftedness in Young Children *by Wendy C. Roedell*

## IV. Diversity References and Resources

# MEI YING'S STORY

*Karen Liu, Ph.D.*
*Indiana State University*

**Teacher Story**

When Mei Ying, a Chinese girl, was three-years old, her parents were students at a university in Indiana. Before Mei Ying arrived in the United States, her parents enrolled her in a child care center. On the day of her arrival, Mei Ying's parents told her about the center. Mei Ying felt confused and wasn't quite sure what to expect.

On the first day of school, Mei Ying's parents took her to the child care center. The children in the center looked very different from Mei Ying. They talked in a language Mei Ying did not understand. When the teacher introduced Mei Ying to the children at the center, they said she didn't look like the Chinese girls in story books. Mei Ying wanted to play with the children, but none of the children wanted to play with her. The children stared, pointed, and giggled at her. Mei Ying did not know what to do.

Mei Ying saw several children playing in the housekeeping area. She loved to play the mama in her old nursery school in China. She walked to the area and noticed several dolls on the floor. All of the dolls had blonde hair. Mei Ying remembered her grandma saying that blonde-haired dolls were very expensive and should only be displayed in a showcase. Mei Ying felt disgusted that children had thrown them on the floor. None of the dolls looked like Mei Ying. Mei Ying did not feel like playing anymore and walked away.

While she lived in China, Mei Ying learned to play many games but she did not know any of the activities the children at the center were doing. Mei Ying loved to read, so she walked to the reading corner and looked through the books displayed on the shelf. She could not read any of them. She flipped through the pictures of one book and found a drawing of a Chinese boy dressed in ceremonial clothes. Mei Ying thought it was strange to see these kinds of pictures in the United States.

The children started playing at a table with beans. Mei Ying walked over to watch. She remembered her grandma telling her not to play with food and walked away. She looked around the room; she could not associate with any of the pictures on the wall. She felt very lonely and wanted to go home, back to China where she could read her favorite books and play and talk with friends. Mei Ying started to cry. Her teacher did not know how to comfort her. Mei Ying told her parents she did not want to return to the center.

Many educators (like the teacher in Mei Ying's story) lack background knowledge about how to create a culturally enriched and responsive environment for young children. In the following article, Dr. Karen Liu shares guidelines and concrete suggestions abut ways to create a multicultural environment that values diversity.

# ASSESSING YOUR CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT TO PROMOTE CULTURAL DIVERSITY

*Karen Liu, Ph.D.*
*Indiana State University*

Children as young as two recognize the differences in physical features among human beings. Research shows that the development of racial awareness begins at age three or four, and the foundations of negative racial attitudes are sometimes laid during the preschool years (Williams & Morland, 1976).

Each child brings a unique family culture into the classroom. Cultural backgrounds influence the way a child thinks about and interacts with people. Children in the primary grades become aware of the differences in physical appearances as they explore the world around them. They are socially active and begin to explore the surrounding world. Teachers can help children have positive interactions with people from other races and cultures and assist them in forming sensitive and supportive perceptions of others. The diversity in the classroom is a natural starting point for increasing children's multicultural awareness.

Teachers in preschool through third grade have the responsibility to provide a culturally responsive program to all children. Multicultural experiences that reflect the diversity in our society must be integrated into the daily curriculum. Classroom displays and materials should include people with disabilities and people from diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds. Children who grow up in a culturally enriched environment develop sensitivity to diversity.

Implementing a culturally responsive program begins with empowerment. Multicultural learning starts with awareness. Cultural awareness gives teachers confidence to understand the complexity of diversity. Teachers who nurture the cultural strengths of all children will promote positive self-esteem among children.

**Guidelines for Helping Children Learn About Cultural Differences and Similarities**:

- Teachers should not criticize a child for noticing and asking questions about the differences in physical features and abilities of people.
- Teachers should listen attentively to a child's questions and provide appropriate and accurate answers.
- If the teacher does not know the answer to a specific question, she should be honest about it and find out the answer for the child.
- Teachers should not ignore or provide excuses for a child's discriminatory behavior. The teacher should intervene immediately.
- Teachers should not take lightly a child's expression of fear and/or anxiety about differences in physical features and abilities of people. The teacher should help children work through their emotions and feelings (Derman-Sparks, 1989).

Creating a diverse classroom environment is an integral part of multicultural teaching. The classroom environment influences children's behavior and their interaction with other people. Teachers need to examine the classroom environment and add nonstereotypic multicultural materials to it.

# CHECKLIST TO CREATE A MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT THAT VALUES DIVERSITY

**Classroom environment:**

- ☐ Is the classroom atmosphere warm and inviting?
- ☐ Are multicultural materials properly displayed?
- ☐ Do wall hangings, paintings, and other visual displays reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds and abilities of all people?
- ☐ Do classroom displays and photos reflect real and accurate images of all people?
- ☐ Are stereotypic visual displays removed from the classroom environment?
- ☐ Is the classroom free from constraining, stereotypic definitions of gender?

**Language Arts:**

- ☐ Are multicultural resources, such as books, newsprint, puppets, audio cassettes, and videotapes culturally inclusive?
- ☐ Are multicultural books bias-free and nonstereotypic?
- ☐ Do the characters in the story have authentic personalities?
- ☐ Are the illustrations free from gender bias and respectful of cultural differences?
- ☐ Are some books, newsprints, and other audio or video materials in a language other than English?
- ☐ Are children encouraged to read and use nonstereotypic multicultural books?
- ☐ Are people who have different languages and cultures invited to the class to share their experiences?

**Social Studies:**

- ☐ Are multiethnic dolls, clothing, shoes, hats, food containers, cooking utensils, etc., available for children?
- ☐ Is there a full-length mirror children can use to notice their skin and hair colors and facial features?
- ☐ Are wall hangings, paintings, wind chimes, and/or rugs from different cultures displayed?
- ☐ Do children have the opportunity to gain a sense of different cultures and occupations during play?
- ☐ Are props that reflect different cultures on display?

**Block and Building Area:**

- ☐ Do the block accessories and people figures represent multiethnic groups?
- ☐ Are the block accessories and people figures bias-free and nonstereotypic?
- ☐ Are children provided transportation toys that are representative of different regions of the world?
- ☐ Do the toy animals represent different regions of the world?
- ☐ Are the children provided different types of building materials (boxes, rubber, plastic, canvass, leaves, husks, sticks, and stones)?
- ☐ Is cross-gender play encouraged?

**Art:**

- ☐ Do children have access to magazines containing diverse people and places?
- ☐ Do children use skin-color crayons, markers, paints, and play dough?
- ☐ Are there culturally rich colors and patterns for children to explore and use in art?
- ☐ Are materials provided for multicultural collages?

**Music:**

- ☐ Are children exposed to a variety of songs and rhythmic instruments from other cultures?
- ☐ Are children able to listen to and record songs and music from various cultures?
- ☐ Do the songs taught reflect fairness, acceptance, cooperation, and the value of cultural awareness?

**Manipulatives:**

- ☐ Do manipulatives show a sensitivity to cultural differences?
- ☐ Are children provided textures and smells that represent different cultures in sensory activities?
- ☐ Are all games nonstereotypic?
- ☐ Are multicultural activities such as sorting foreign coins, matching ethnic fabrics, etc. available?
- ☐ Is cooperative play encouraged?

**Curriculum integration and making cultural connections: Does the . . .**

- ☐ primary grade curriculum focus on assisting children in the development of a positive self-concept and attitude toward diversity?
- ☐ curriculum help children develop a cultural sensitivity and literacy?
- ☐ curriculum help children identify similarities among people and their lifestyles while exploring cultural diversity?
- ☐ curriculum present children with current and up-to-date cultural images and information?
- ☐ curriculum help in expanding children's cultural understanding through appropriate teaching materials and resources?

Teachers need to use an integrated approach in implementing a multicultural curriculum that values cultural diversity in the classroom. Children need to be able to relate current and developmentally appropriate cultural information to their daily life experiences.

The "tourist" curriculum approach as defined by Louise Derman-Sparks and the ABC Task Force should be avoided in the curriculum. The "tourist" multicultural curriculum is an add-on curriculum that includes ceremonial types of celebrations and artifacts. The activities depict special cultural events and are not representative of a culture's daily life. As a result, children may develop a stereotyped image that people who have a different cultural background do strange things.

**Gender identity:**

Primary children are in the critical development stage of identifying their gender roles. Teachers should provide an environment that is free from constraining and stereotypic definitions of gender roles for young children. Teachers need to promote equality of development for both boys and girls and help them develop skills to challenge gender stereotypes and discriminatory behavior.

To support the development of gender identity, teachers need to organize the classroom environment to encourage more cross-gender play choices. Books, pictures, illustrations, and posters that are free of gender bias need to be provided.

**Working with parents**:

Working with parents is an integral part of teaching. Teachers should discuss their multicultural approach with parents. Teachers can show respect and appreciation of parents' cultural heritage, values, and practices by encouraging parents to share their culture with the children in the classroom.

## References

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# early years are learning years

## Linguistic and Cultural Diversity—Building on America's Strengths

As our nation becomes more linguistically and culturally diverse and as the issue of bilingual education becomes more politically charged, early childhood educators have a responsibility to understand how best to meet children's needs and how to provide effective early childhood education for *all* children. NAEYC's position statement, Responding to Linguistic and Cultural Diversity-Recommendations for Effective Early Childhood Education, offers principles of good early childhood practice which hold true regardless of the language spoken by children or their families.

Unfortunately, our nation tends to regard children's differences—language differences, in particular—as handicaps rather than resources. Negative attitudes toward non-English speakers can lead to children's difficulties in mastering. English as well as their first language. Children will develop the use of English even if their home language is preserved. Educators should encourage the use of home language learning while fostering the acquisition of English in order to strengthen ties between programs and families.

Parents and educators must recognize that children actively attempt to understand their world through their own language and culture. For this reason, children learn best when they acquire skills in a meaningful context. Identifying what children already know and building on their prior learning, regardless of language, will help promote an environment that engages all children in learning. NAEYC's position statement acknowledges the challenges facing early childhood educators who may not be adequately trained to work with children whose home language is not English. Even though an educator may not be familiar with a child's language and culture, the educator has a responsibility to respect the child and family. Encouraging dialog, play and projects that promote social interaction and first-hand experiences are the best ways to facilitate second language learning among preschoolers.

Programs and families must work together to afford children every opportunity to learn and to become effective, functioning members of society. This is best achieved when young children feel supported, nurtured, and connected not only to their home communities but also to the teachers and the educational setting.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN

- Recognize that all children are cognitively, linguistically, and emotionally connected to the language and culture of their home.
- Acknowledge that children can demonstrate their knowledge and capabilities in many ways.
- Understand that without comprehensible input, second-language learning can be difficult.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WORKING WITH FAMILIES

- Actively involve parents and families in the early learning program and setting.
- Encourage and assist all parents in becoming knowledgeable about the cognitive value for children of knowing more than one language, and provide them with strategies to support, maintain, and preserve home-language learning.
- Recognize that parents and families must rely on caregivers and educators to honor and support their children in the cultural values and norms of the home.

Responding to Linguistic and Cultural Diversity—Recommendations for Effective Early Childhood Education appeared in *Young Children*, January 1996. For a copy of the position statement, send a SASE to NAEYC, 1509 16th St., NW, Washington, DC, 20036-1426. Specify Box #550 (English version), or Box #551 (Spanish version). 50¢ each/ 100 for $10.

**naeyc** NATIONAL ASSOCIATION for the EDUCATION of YOUNG CHILDREN, 1509 16th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036-1426
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# early years are learning years

## Celebrating holidays in early childhood programs

Holiday celebrations can be wonderful opportunities for children to learn about the traditions and values that are cherished parts of people's lives. But many early childhood professionals wonder what holidays to celebrate in the program or classroom and how to respect the cultures represented by all children. Many parents, too, wonder why programs celebrate specific holidays—or why they discourage any celebration at all.

NAEYC believes that decisions about what holidays to celebrate are best made together by teachers, parents, and children. Families and staff are more comfortable when both have expressed their views and understand how a decision has been reached. The important thing for all to remember is that when planning holiday activities, the rules of good practice continue to apply: Are the activities meaningful to the children? Are their needs and interests being met? Is the activity a valuable use of children's time?

Teachers may survey families at the beginning of the year to determine what holidays to celebrate. They may even ask the children to create their own holiday to help them learn the concepts that underlie such valued traditions. In any case, holiday celebrations are just one way for programs and families to work together to create developmentally and culturally appropriate learning experiences.

***Here are some signs of good practice in celebrating holidays:***

- Parents and teachers ask themselves why children should learn about this holiday. Is it developmentally appropriate for those in the group? Why is it important to specific children and families?
- Activities are connected to specific children and families in the group. This helps children understand holiday activities in the context of people's daily lives. Children should have the chance to explore the meaning and significance of each holiday.
- Children are encouraged to share feelings and information about the holidays they celebrate. This will help them make the distinction between learning about another person's holiday rituals and celebrating one's own holidays. Children may participate as "guests" in holiday activities that are not part of their own cultures.
- Every group represented in the classroom is honored (both children and staff). This does not mean that every holiday of every group must be celebrated—classrooms would be celebrating all the time! It does mean that once families and programs have decided on what holidays to celebrate, none should be treated as if they are, "unusual." Children should recognize that everyones holidays are culturally significant and meaningful.
- Activities demonstrate the fact that not everyone in the same ethnic group celebrates holidays in the same way. Families may provide examples of their own unique traditions.
- Curriculum demonstrates respect for everyone's customs. If children are observing different holidays at the same time, the values and traditions of each child's culture should be acknowledged.
- Parents and teachers work together to plan strategies for children whose families' beliefs do not permit participation in holiday celebrations. Families should take part in creating satisfactory alternatives for the child within the classroom.
- Focus is on meaningful ways to celebrate holidays without spending money. Families may find certain holidays stressful due to the amount of commercialization and the media pressure to buy gifts. Teachers can help by showing children that homemade costumes and gifts are very special, and celebrating can be joyful without gifts.

**Additional Resources:**

Hunt, M. 1995. Let there be light: Lighting up the holidays for young children. *Young Children* 51(5): 79-81.

McCracken, J.B. 1993. Valuing diversity: The primary years. Washington. DC:NAEYC. #238/$7.

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# II. Understanding and Responding to Differences

## FAMILY DIVERSITY

Every child is a member of a family. Regardless of where or with whom children live, they belong to a group of people who share one or more of the following family ties: kinship, affection, cultural knowledge, and resources. While the term 'family diversity' is often used to describe racial and ethnic variations, other factors, such as adoption, foster care, socioeconomic status, and lifestyle, also account for differences among families. These factors in themselves do not determine the amount nor the quality of nurturing young children receive. All kinds of families can provide the love and support necessary for healthy psychosocial development.

Myths and stereotypes about the 'ideal' family can influence teacher expectations and attitudes regarding the ability of children to learn and behave. Some homes may be consciously or subconsciously judged unsatisfactory or culturally inferior simply on the basis of race, lifestyle, family structure, or socioeconomic status. By acknowledging and celebrating a wide spectrum of families in the curriculum, early childhood teachers can discourage prejudgment and reinforce the vital link between home and school.

Teachers can observe children's behaviors in order to identify...the learning preferences, cognitive strengths, and cultural values that originate in the home. This child-generated knowledge is an essential component of an equitable curriculum. In turn, such information opens doors for more meaningful interaction with parents and other caregivers.

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### Respecting All Families

Value the cultural knowledge children bring to school by acknowledging family diversity through discussion, affirmation, and celebration. For example:

1. View linguistic and cultural diversity as strengths (e.g., bilingualism is an asset).
2. Use books and other resources that reflect all kinds of families.
3. Display pictures that children draw of their families, or have each child make a page in a class book titled *Our Families*.
4. Discuss experiences children choose to share about what makes their family special.
5. Avoid family-related activities that potentially exclude some children (e.g., holding a Mother's Tea, making Father's Day cards, creating 'family trees').
6. Observe a *Someone Special Day* and have children make gifts and invite significant others of their choice to school for breakfast, a play, a concert, or other event.

(Source: Carnes, J. (Ed). (1997). *Starting Small: Teaching Tolerance in Preschool and the Early Grades.* Montgomery, AL: Southern Poverty Law Center. Reprinted by permission.)

# UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO DIFFERENCES

Diversity in culture, social class, special needs, and language is often part of the school environment. "We ask a great deal of children when they enter the classroom: to leave the familiar environment of home; to encounter peers and adults who may look, act, speak and think differently from themselves and their family; and to 'fit in' successfully with these strangers as learners and friends. Although such tasks involve unique developmental dimensions in young children, public life presents all of us with a similar challenge" (Carnes, 1997, p. v). In *Affirming Diversity* (1996), Sonia Nieto states that to become a multicultural teacher, one must first become a multicultural person. She lists three reeducation steps: (l) learn more by reading and being involved in activities that emphasize pluralism; (2) confront one's own racism and biases; and (3) learn to see reality from a variety of perspectives.

Many times student behaviors and actions are misinterpretated because of a lack of awareness or personal bias. Teachers and administrators need to be aware that various behaviors, such as an Hispanic child lowering the eyes when being addressed by an adult, or a Native American child shirking from a friendly touch, may not be signs of defiance but of cultural expectations. At the same time, educators should not base expectations on their perceptions or stereotypes about various cultures, special needs, and social classes. For example, parent involvement and concern can be strong in families from all socioeconomic backgrounds; a child from an Asian background may not excel or even have a strong interest in mathematics; and a child with severe physical disabilities may not have cognitive learning difficulties.

If schools are to maintain a balance between education and socially, culturally, and economically diverse students, knowledge of child development must be set in a broader social context. "(Teachers) must create a classroom environment in which both they and their students, each with their own past experience, build a social system together. . . .It assumes that teachers are able to draw on and face their own backgrounds, their empathies, their cultural preferences, and their prejudices—to know themselves as well as their children" (Bowman, 1994,p. 224). "When teachers are unable to evoke what children already know to inform what they want to teach, the teaching/learning process is imperiled. When teachers assume that mainstream behavior is 'normal' and that the behavior of other groups is deviant or deficient, they are apt to ignore the cognitive structures children already have, to misread children's abilities, and to mis-design curricula" (Bowman, 1994, p. 222). Problems arise when there is a discrepancy between what children know and do and "what is expected of them by schools that are organized to accommodate and reinforce white, middle-class values, beliefs, and behaviors" (Bowman, 1994, p.19).

Research is showing that even though high-quality programs cannot make problems go away, they can reduce the extent of these problems (Schweinhart, 1994). In high quality programs the curriculum encourages young children to initiate their own learning activities and to solve their everyday intellectual, social, and physical problems. "Such a curriculum is thematic, experiential, challenging, comprehensive, and inclusive of multiple perspectives. . .(It) focuses on a broad range of learning styles; builds from perceptions of student strengths, interests, and experience; and is participatory and facilitative, creating ongoing opportunities for self-reflection, critical inquiry, problem solving, and dialogue. Grouping practices . . .promote heterogeneity and inclusion, cooperation, shared responsibility, and a sense of belonging. And, lastly, evaluation. . .focuses on multiple intelligences, utilizes authentic assessments, and fosters self-reflection" (Benard, 1995).

". . .(W)hen schools are places where the basic human needs for support, respect, and belonging are met, motivation for learning is fostered. Reciprocal caring, respectful, and participatory relationships are the critical determining factors in whether a student learns; whether parents become and stay involved in the school; whether a program or strategy is effective; whether an educational change is sustained; and, ultimately, whether a youth feels he or she has a place in this society" (Benard, 1995).

## *Four Areas of Change to Respond to Socioeconomic and Cultural Differences*

**Assessment:**

What is needed are assessments that clarify the reasons for a child's performance rather than simply documenting the fact of it. Teachers need to examine the reasons for children's performance, including culturally embedded factors that help explain it.

**Relationships:**

Adults and older members of a community provide instruction, scaffolding, and models for young children, teaching them to understand the world as the adults do and helping them transfer what they know and can do from one context to another. By providing emotional support, by reminding children of what they already know, by defining the similarities between social situations, and by modeling appropriate behavior, adults help children use their skills and acquire new ones.

**School/Home Connections:**

The task for schools is to find ways to resolve the conflicts and to engage parents in support of the school and its curricula. This will require giving parents a role in selecting and assessing the curricula. When children are not required to renounce their cultural heritage, school achievement improves markedly (Au & Kawakami, 1991).

**Professionalizing Teaching:**

To educate culturally and linguistically diverse students, teachers must be sensitive to the similarities and differences between themselves and their students and their families. They must create a classroom environment in which they and their students, each with their own past experience, build a social system together. Teachers must be able to draw on and face their own backgrounds, empathies, cultural preferences, and prejudices.

(Source: Bowman, B.T. (1994). The Challenge of Diversity. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(3), p. 218-224.)

BIRTHDAY BOOK

# DISCOVERING DIVERSITY

Teachers need to take the time to reflect on changes in their own and their students' perceptions of "same" and "different." Appreciation for diversity at hand can be used to cultivate a commitment to equity and justice in the wider society.

➢ Examine how you and your students treat others who are perceived as different or those who make you uncomfortable.

1 - How do you and your class make "new" students welcome?

2 - How do you address the problem when classmates exclude particular children?

3 - Do you handle diversity issues, such as children's cruelty to a student who is differently abled physically or intellectually?

4 - What actions do you and your students take when you see racially motivated injustices against particular children present in the classroom or statements made about people from other racial-ethnic groups?

➢ Help children appreciate the diversity within their own racial, ethnic, or cultural group and family. For example:

5 - Discuss differences and similarities in children's home traditions and rituals. Encourage children to find other characteristics to compare and contrast.

6 - Group children heterogeneously in organized play and work activities (e.g., by gender, popularity, religious orientation, ability, and economic status) to provide the broadest cross-section of sociocultural interactions.

➢ Instill in children the knowledge that differences in physical traits, cultural backgrounds, abilities, and perceived needs and preferences are valued in the classroom. For example:

7 - Involve all children in decision-making about classroom activities and rules so they can see each other and their actions as critical components of their world.

8 - Reinforce the concept that differences contribute to the richness of the classroom community (e.g., differing opinions help us think about the same idea in new ways; creative problem-solving gives us more options to choose from; the ways different children find to illustrate the same story give us more pictures to enjoy).

(Source: Carnes, J. (Ed). (1997). *Starting Small: Teaching Tolerance in Preschool and Early Grades*, p. 81-82. Montgomery, AL: Southern Poverty Law Center. Reprinted by permission.)

# early years are learning years

## Teaching young children to resist bias

The early years are the time to begin helping children form strong, positive self-images and grow up to respect and get along with people who are different from themselves. We know from research that children between 2 and 5 start becoming aware of gender, race, ethnicity, and disabilities. They also begin to absorb both the positive attitudes and negative biases attached to these aspects of our identity by family members and other significant adults in their lives. If we want children to like themselves and value diversity, we must learn how to help them resist the biases and prejudices that are still far too prevalent in our society.

Bias based on gender, race, disability, or social class creates serious obstacles to all young children's healthy development. In order to develop healthy self-esteem, they must learn how to interact fairly and productively with different types of people. Naturally, children's curiosity will lead them to ask questions: "Why is her skin so dark?" "Why does he speak funny?" We may hide our own negative feelings, or hope that children simply won't notice, but our avoidance actually teaches children that some differences are not acceptable. We must face our own biased attitudes and change them in order to help foster all children's growth.

**What parents and teachers can do:**

- Recognize that because we live in a society where many biases exist, we must counteract them—or else we will support them through our silence.
- At home or at school, give children messages that deliberately contrast stereotypes by providing books, dolls, toys, wall decorations, TV programs, and records that show
  —men and women in nontraditional roles,
  —people of color in leadership positions,
  —people with disabilities doing activities familiar to children, and
  —various types of families and family activities.
- Show no bias in the friends, doctors, teachers, and other service providers that you choose, nor in the stores where you shop. Remember what you do is as important as what you say.
- Make it a firm rule that a person's appearance is never an acceptable reason for teasing or rejecting them. Immediately step in if you hear or see your child behave in such a way.
- Talk positively about each child's physical characteristics and cultural heritage. And, help children learn the differences between feelings of superiority and those of self-esteem and pride in their own heritage.
- Provide opportunities for children to interact with other children who are racially/culturally different from themselves and with people who have various disabilities.
- Respectfully listen to and answer children's questions about themselves and others. Don't ignore, change the subject, or in any way make the child think she is bad for asking such a question.
- Teach children how to challenge biases about who they are. Give them tools to confront those who act biased against them.
- Use accurate and fair images in contrast to stereotypes, and encourage children to talk about the differences. Help them to think critically about what they see in books, movies, greeting cards, comics, and on TV.
- Let children know that unjust things can be changed. Encourage children to challenge bias, and involve children in taking action on issues relevant to their lives.

Building a healthy self-identity is a process that continues all our lives. Help children get a head start by teaching them to resist bias, and to value the differences between people as much as the similarities.

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**naeyc** NATIONAL ASSOCIATION for the EDUCATION of YOUNG CHILDREN, 1509 16th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036-1426
202-232-8777, 800-424-2460, FAX: 202-328-1846

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# III. Inclusion of Students with Special Needs

**Teacher Story**

## HAVING ADAM

*(The names in the following story have been changed. To respect the confidentiality of the individuals, the author wishes to remain anonymous.)*

Adam is a child with autism who spent a year with me in second grade. Before Adam was placed in my room, it was explained to me that he was high-functioning and that a full-time aide, Anne, would be available in the classroom. The majority of students placed in my room had worked with Adam in first grade. I really didn't know what to expect; I had never worked with an autistic child before. My goal was for the class to become a community of learners who respected each other.

Adam liked to participate in discussions but often would talk about anything important to him at the time. The students were beginning to make faces and not call on him. This situation was bothering me. I had Anne take him to the library, and I took some time with the class to discuss autism. The students were very interested as we talked about how Adam could do many of the same things everyone could do. We also discussed many of the areas in which he would need help and understanding. I helped them understand it was important to listen to him and encourage him to participate in everything that went on in the room. It was crucial for the class to understand he could be hurt by expressions and exclusions. I found that these young children were more caring and understanding of human differences than most adults. From then on, Adam was always included in discussions, and I found the children asking him critical questions and listening to his responses. Students started clapping when he shared information, and he really enjoyed this. He would often ask them to clap before he shared.

Adam was an independent reader; but, at the beginning of the year, I was unable to determine the level of his comprehension. He didn't want to write and would cry or go to his space during writer's workshop. At the beginning of the year, he had picked a place that he knew he could go when he was upset or unable to handle his behavior. Sometimes, I was able to ask him to go to his space, but often he knew when he needed this time alone. Adam often cried and wanted Anne, his aide, to complete written work for him.

The special education consultant suggested that I have Adam use the computer for writing. She shared that some autistic children actually feel pain when pushing on paper with a pencil. We showed Adam how to use the computer and were amazed at his writing ability. The most surprising thing was the humor in his writing. I began to question his comprehension. The more I listened to Adam, the more I realized how well he really understood. I found by rephrasing questions, he was often able to answer what was asked.

Math was very difficult for Adam. In first grade, Anne had worked with him using touch-point math, and we continued to use this method. Cooperative activities were extremely complicated for Adam and frustrating for the members of his group. Often, he didn't understand what they wanted him to do, or he would get upset if he didn't get the job or part he wanted. He often had to escape from the group and go to his space. We never found a way to make group work easier for him.

We did make some progress with computation skills; addition was easier than subtraction. Even though I was better able to understand his reading comprehension, I was never able to interpret what math concepts he understood. During the end of the year interview, Adam said he needed to be better at math. Up until that time, I hadn't realized he was able to set goals for himself.

The noise level in the room often distressed Adam. It was interesting to see how he handled the problem and how the students responded. When it became intolerable for him, he would shout out, "Kids, kids!" "It's loud," and "I don't like it!" Surprisingly, they would immediately lower their voice level, and everyone continued to work. Our community had learned to rely on each other and provide the atmosphere necessary for all of us to learn.

Near the end of the year, a guest speaker selected Adam to come forward in front of the entire student body to participate in a magic trick. The speaker didn't know Adam had autism, and we didn't know what would happen. He started by pretending Adam had the money in his pocket he had pretended to take from another student's ear. We could tell Adam was confused, but he was able to stay there. It was the first time I saw Adam handle teasing. When the trick was completed, Adam walked back to his seat on the bleachers. As he passed his classmates, they gave him the high-five sign and cheered. He was beaming and, more importantly, the children's faces indicated they really understood what this meant to Adam.

Developing a sense of community is essential when it comes to classroom learning. Having Adam was a humbling experience for me. Twenty young children taught me what learning is all about.

**Parent Story**

# JENNY'S SUCCESS

*(To respect the confidentiality of the individuals, the author wishes to remain anonymous.)*

Jenny was born in the spring of 1971. We already had two healthy, energetic little girls and, with Jenny's arrival, we expected she would be just as healthy and energetic. Soon after her arrival, we found out she had been born with cerebral palsy. Our hearts were broken by the news, and our family wondered if we would be able to meet the challenge. She was given to us to love, care, and nurture, and we certainly could and would do that; but, we also wanted Jenny to grow up knowing she could do anything she wanted to do if she tried hard enough. The doctors prepared us by explaining the many developmental delays she would encounter as she went from infancy to adolescence. The prospect that she would walk, run, and play like other children was very slim. Even with this prognosis, as a family, we decided to provide her every opportunity possible to develop as an individual and encourage her to be self-sufficient.

Jenny was born with a winning personality and, even as a baby, was always smiling and laughing. Everyone would comment on Jenny's pleasant disposition. The doctors had been correct when they said that, compared to my other children, everything would be much harder for Jenny to do. Jenny would watch her sisters everyday as they went about their daily routines; although it took her much longer to accomplish a task, she never gave up trying.

When she was four years old, we enrolled her in a nursery school. We knew she needed to have the same opportunities as her sisters. Jenny loved the experience of being with the other children and trying all that they did each day. At times she did get frustrated; when that happened, she would just try harder.

When she turned five years old, it was time to go to public kindergarten. She was put in a special education class that mainstreamed the children into a regular kindergarten. At that time, the only way Jenny could get around was by crawling or using a wheelchair. Most of the time, Jenny refused the wheelchair and insisted on crawling in the school and in the classroom. At the close of each school day, I would ask her, "Jenny, why don't you use the wheelchair?" Her response was always, "I have to crawl, Mommy, if I ever want to learn to walk." I finally realized one day that perhaps she was right, so I never asked her again.

She loved kindergarten even more than nursery school. She would always try the activities she watched the other children doing. She never said, "I can't do it." While in kindergarten, Jenny learned to use the typewriter to do her writing. It was through this medium that she learned to express herself and feel success. We celebrated every success that Jenny had in kindergarten. If she had not been given the opportunity to be included in this regular classroom, I am not quite sure where Jenny would be today.

As she progressed through elementary school, junior high school, and high school she was included in all the regular classrooms. During these years, she had occupational therapy three times a week. At the end of elementary school, Jenny was walking! This took place only because of her inner fortitude and determination.

Upon graduation from high school, Jenny went on to attend Ivy Tech College. Each day she rode the city bus to and from school. Three years ago, she graduated from Ivy Tech with an Associate Degree in Child Care. Since her graduation, she has been working as an assistant to the kindergarten teacher in a child care center in Indianapolis. Just last year, Jenny walked down the aisle to get married to a young man whom she met at a rehabilitation center. He is legally blind and works in a local grocery store.

As Jenny's Mother, I am so thankful! I want to thank the schools for accepting Jenny and including her in regular classrooms. I am convinced that her inclusion in regular education allowed her to grow. I am indebted to all the teachers who helped Jenny be what she is today.

# INCLUSION IN A THIRD GRADE CLASSROOM

**Teacher Story**

*(The names in the following story have been changed. To respect the confidentiality of the individuals, the author wishes to remain anonymous.)*

Mary and Bill joined my third grade class during our school's second year of inclusion. Bill, a student with severe disabilities, had no language skills and some inappropriate behaviors. Mary was his Program Assistant. Both needed to find their niche in our classroom community, and I didn't have a clue as to how that would happen. Mary came with a positive outlook and saw possibilities for Bill's inclusion, not limitations. I took my cues from her, and together we found ways to build a classroom environment that offered multiple learning opportunities for Bill while encouraging acceptance and appreciation for his special needs.

It did not happen overnight. At first, Bill had many accidents and disrupted class with his strange noises. All the newness was overwhelming for him: new routines, new people, a new classroom, new opportunities. Mary was constantly in and out of the classroom. We often met before and after school to brainstorm and problem solve.

Whenever possible, Bill worked right along with the rest of the class. If they worked on handwriting, he worked on writing his name. If they were reading, he was part of a literature circle. With Mary's help, Bill did all the hands-on science experiments. He particularly enjoyed our unit on flight in which we flew paper airplanes and dropped boiled eggs with parachutes attached. Bill loved to look at books, so we encouraged other students to partner read with him (although sometimes he grabbed the books and ripped the pages). My students also loved the extra adult attention that came with having Mary read along. When we started classroom businesses with our mini-economy unit, Bill and Mary offered to help several students bind books to sell. Bill was always an integral part of these work sessions. When some of my students wanted to sell baked goods, it was turned into an opportunity for Bill and two other children to learn the art of baking.

Once a week, Mary taught all students sign language. The students practiced by signing to Bill. Bill loved all the attention. By allowing Mary a leadership role in the classroom, students came to respect her and looked to her for help. This was a bonus for me.

I wish I knew the magic formula for creating a positive inclusion experience. We certainly tried everything. Mary says it was my acceptance of her and Bill, but I am convinced that it was her positive attitude and willingness to contribute to the classroom that led to a successful inclusion experience. Together, we discussed our frustrations and worked for solutions. Together, we celebrated each child's accomplishments. Bill was one of my twenty-four students and an important member of the class. I believe inclusion was a positive experience not only for him but also for us.

# INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

"Inclusion is about more than techniques and student organizational patterns. It is about more than assistive technology or having more than one adult in the classroom. Inclusion is a philosophy of education. It is a complex belief system about how we see all children, how we view our roles, and how we interact" (Sparduti, 1996, p. 4). Inclusion allows special needs students the opportunity to receive needed educational services without being removed from the classroom. This process of bringing together special and regular needs children is based on the rationale that it enriches the lives of both, assists all children in becoming more sensitive to individual differences, and increases special needs children's skill development by observation and interaction with regular needs children.

A child can be defined as having special needs "if he or she is in some way outside the range of what we consider to be characteristic of a particular age. . . . (A)lthough each child is unique and. . .naturally differs from one another, the child with special needs differs from the average child in some way beyond that found in the normal range of individual differences" (Chandler, 1994, p. 5). These needs can be physical, social, and/or emotional and vary in form and degree of severity. In order to recognize developmental delays and disabilities, children need to be assessed by specialists well trained and experienced in child development.

The purposes of these assessments are to:

1. identify the child's strengths and weaknesses and to determine the nature and cause of problems, deficiencies, and/or disabilities,
2. to make recommendations for remediation, and
3. to help develop general goals for the child to be included into the classroom.

For inclusion to work in the schools, the entire school staff must view it as an integrated part of the system, not as an add-on. "Any change in education is more likely to occur when it is carried out simultaneously by groups of people within which a norm of collegiality is established" (Stokes & Howard, 1996, p. 19). The staff should share responsibility in planning and carrying out strategies that make an inclusive program successful. They need to talk together and help each other solve problems. Every person in the building becomes active in the learning process of all students. Teachers and necessary staff members need to be provided proper preparation, support, and services, along with adequate professional development. They need:

- specific training in the different types of disabilities their students have,
- knowledge of what to expect from students with disabilities,
- an understanding of how to encourage and challenge students with disabilities,
- teaching techniques for the students with disabilities,
- time to modify the curriculum for each child, prepare materials, and collaborate with other staff members, and
- opportunities to discuss issues, problem-solve, and share their reflections.

Listed on the next page are some of the activities and support systems that have been utilized where successful inclusion has occurred.

## ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

- ✓ The teacher believes that the student can succeed.
- ✓ School personnel are committed to accepting responsibility for the learning outcomes of students with disabilities.
- ✓ School personnel and the students in the class have been prepared to receive a student with disabilities.
- ✓ Parents are informed and support program goals.
- ✓ Special education staff are committed to collaborative practice in general education classrooms.

## SCHOOL SUPPORT

- ✓ The principal understands the needs of students with disabilities.
- ✓ Adequate numbers of personnel, including aides and support personnel, are available.
- ✓ Adequate staff development and technical assistance, based on the needs of the school personnel, are being provided (e.g., information on disabilities, instructional methods, awareness, and acceptance activities for students and team building).
- ✓ Appropriate policies and procedures for monitoring individual student progress, including grading and testing, are in place.

## SERVICE AND PHYSICAL ACCOMMODATIONS

- ✓ Services needed by the student are available (e.g., health, physical, occupational, or speech therapy).
- ✓ Accommodations to the physical plant and equipment are adequate to meet the student's needs (e.g., toys, building and playground facilities, learning materials, assistive devices).

## COLLABORATION

- ✓ Special educators are part of the instructional or planning team.
- ✓ Teaming approaches are used for problem-solving and program implementation.
- ✓ Regular teachers, special education teachers, and other specialists collaborate (e.g., co-teaching, team teaching, teacher assistance teams).

## INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS

- ✓ Teachers have the knowledge and skills needed to select and adapt curricula and instructional methods according to individual student needs.
- ✓ A variety of instructional arrangements are available (e.g., team teaching, cross-grade grouping, peer tutoring, teacher assistance teams).
- ✓ Teachers foster a cooperative learning environment and promote socialization.

(Source: (1993) *Including Students with Disabilities in General Education Classrooms*. Eric Digest. Reprinted by permission.)

# early years are learning years

## The benefits of an inclusive education: Making it work

In an increasing number of early childhood programs around the country, teachers, children, and parents are discovering the benefits of educating young children with special needs together with their same-age peers. Since learning is so important in the early years, this is the best time for children to begin to respect all people's differences and the contributions each individual makes. The key to creating a successful inclusive program is educating ourselves and others about how to ensure every student in the classroom has the chance to reach his or her fullest potential.

Children with disabilites are, first and foremost, children, and then children who may need support or adaptations for learning. The term "special needs" refers to a wide range of developmental disabilities or learning needs that may occur in different areas and to varying degrees. Traditionally, children with special needs were pulled out of regular classrooms and grouped together as if all their needs were alike. Relatively few children with disabilities were served in community-based early childhood programs apart from Head Start or public school programs.

In 1992, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) established equal rights for people with disabilities in employment, state and local public services, and public accommodations including preschools, child care centers and family child care homes. The ADA has helped more and more educators recognize that developmentally appropriate classrooms are places where all children can and should learn together.

Early childhood teachers' strong knowledge of child development helps them to successfully teach young children with all talents, interests, and abilities. In effective inclusive programs, teachers adapt activities to include all students, even though their individual goals may be different. At times, early childhood professionals and children may benefit from the assistance of related professionals such as physical therapists and other school personnel who recognize children's individual interests and strengths.

Some raise concerns about the advisability of creating inclusive environments: Will inclusive classrooms hinder the academic success of children without special needs? How will an inclusive environment meet the needs of children with disabilities? Will children without special needs lose out on teacher time? How can early childhood professionals access resources, support and training? While these questions are valid, parents and teachers will find that creative modifications help all children's learning. According to the director of one NAEYC-accredited center, "Inclusion has helped us better focus on meeting the needs of every child in our program."

Research shows that the benefits of inclusive classrooms reach beyond academics. This is particularly important for young children, who learn best when they feel safe, secure, and at home in their classrooms. An environment that encourages young children's social and emotional development will stimulate all aspects of their learning.

Children in inclusive classrooms:

- **demonstrate increased acceptance and appreciation of diversity;**
- **develop better communication and social skills;**
- **show greater development in moral and ethical principles;**
- **create warm and caring friendships; and**
- **demonstrate increased self-esteem.**

Early childhood professionals who have successfully included young children with special needs note that, contrary to some expectations, they needed few adaptations to meet the needs of all children. They report not necessarily needing more staff, money, or expertise, but rather support from peers and specialists, willingness to adapt to new environments, and positive relationships with families.

Professional development program, supplemental support staff, and teamwork by parents and school personnel will help achieve inclusion's ultimate goal: to provide a challenging and supportive educational experience for all children.

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**naeyc** NATIONAL ASSOCIATION for the EDUCATION of YOUNG CHILDREN, 1509 16th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036-1426
202-232-8777, 800-424-2460, FAX: 202-328-1846

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**ERIC** Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
University of Illinois
51 Gerty Drive
Champaign, Illinois 61820-7469

Phone: (800) 583-4135
(217) 333-1386
Fax: (217) 333-3767
Email: ericeece@uiuc.edu

# Integrating Children with Disabilities into Preschool

*Karen E. Diamond, Linda L. Hestenes, and Caryn O'Connor*

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These days, community preschool programs are increasingly likely to have at least one child with disabilities in their classes. Although providing early intervention to children with disabilities in an inclusive or integrated environment designed to meet the needs of ALL children is commonly regarded as best practice (Salisbury, 1991), concerns are sometimes raised about the ability of preschool programs to meet the needs of children developing normally as well as those with developmental delays. This digest examines research on preschool programs that include children both with and without disabilities.

## APPROPRIATENESS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

An assumption in some early childhood special education programs is that children's disabilities prevent them from taking advantage of the experiences that promote typical child development. Recent research suggests that this assumption may not be valid. Lamorey and Bricker, for example, in a study of integrated programs (Peck et al., 1993, p.249-270), found that children with disabilities enrolled in integrated early childhood programs demonstrated higher levels of social play and more appropriate social interactions, and were more likely to initiate interactions with peers than children in self-contained special education preschool classes. Children with disabilities in integrated classes make gains in language, cognitive, and motor development that are comparable to peers in self-contained special education classrooms (Fewell & Oelwein, 1990).

Children with disabilities also display more advanced play in inclusive settings than they do in self-contained classrooms. However, Odom and Brown, in a discussion of social interaction skills interventions (Peck et al., 1993, p.39-64), note that even in inclusive settings, young children with disabilities are more likely to engage in noninteractive play, are less likely to participate in play groups, and are chosen as playmates less frequently than are their peers without disabilities.

Some research suggests that it is the type of learning experiences that are provided rather than the type of classroom setting (integrated or segregated) that is critical in fostering children's development. Mahoney and his colleagues (Mahoney & Powell, 1988; Mahoney et al., 1992) found that children with disabilities were more likely to initiate play activities and communications with their peers in settings where the adults displayed responsive and child-oriented teaching styles than in classes where adults used directed and instructionally oriented styles. Results of another study indicated that child-directed teaching strategies resulted in greater gains in communication skills for children with severe disabilities than did direct instruction (Yoder et al., 1991). The teaching practices described in these studies are compatible with developmentally appropriate teaching practices common in regular early childhood education programs.

## INTEGRATED PROGRAMS AND CHILDREN WITHOUT DISABILITIES

The results of several studies suggest that children without disabilities benefit from integrated classes that also address the needs of children with disabilities. Normally developing children enrolled in integrated programs make developmental gains at least equivalent to those made by their peers in nonintegrated programs (Odom & McEvoy, 1988).

Parents and teachers believe that integrated programs offer additional benefits for children without disabilities. Parents have reported that normally developing children enrolled in integrated settings displayed less prejudice and fewer stereotypes, and were more responsive and helpful to others, than were children in other settings (Peck et al., 1992). Teachers have reported that children without disabilities became increasingly aware of the needs of others when they were enrolled in a class including a child with a severe disability (Giangreco et al., 1993). While these findings are not based on direct observations but on teachers' and parents' perceptions, they emphasize the potential social benefits of integration for children without disabilities.

## ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF INTEGRATED PROGRAMS

Administrative characteristics of successfully integrated programs, according to Peck, Furman, and Helmstetter as reported in Peck et al. (1993, p.187-205), are based on a philosophy that emphasizes the acceptance of diversity and that places value on the program's role in and participation in its community. The implementation of specialized interventions within naturally occurring situations without disrupting the curriculum and educational routines of the early childhood classroom was also an important factor in ensuring the success of an integrated program.

Peck, Furman, and Helmstetter found that the progress made by individual children in meeting developmental goals was not a critical factor in determining whether or not a program remained integrated. Rather, the major reasons integrated childhood programs did not survive (that is, became resegregated) were related to the struggles between professionals over issues such as management of time during the school day, types of classroom activities, and intervention strategies. In other studies, teachers emphasized the need for goals shared with special education and support personnel (Giangreco et al., 1993; Rose & Smith, 1993).

## NATURALISTIC TEACHING STRATEGIES

In addition to good administration, appropriate teaching strategies are an important component of a successfully integrated early childhood program. Recent research suggests that NATURALISTIC teaching strategies provide an approach for implementing intervention within regular classroom routines (Bricker & Cripe, 1992). In naturalistic approaches, intervention is provided within the context of naturally occurring activities in the child's environment. *ACTIVITY-BASED INTERVENTION* is one such approach. (Although not discussed here, *MILIEU LANGUAGE TEACHING* and *TRANSACTIONAL INTERVENTION* are other such approaches.) Naturalistic intervention strategies reflect practices grounded in theories of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Dewey, and complement the developmentally appropriate practice model used in early childhood classrooms. Naturalistic intervention illustrates the principle of nonintrusive individual instruction as applied in an integrated preschool classroom. The goal of activity-based intervention is to develop functional and generalizable skills. Functional skills are those that allow children to negotiate through their environments in ways that are satisfying and encourage independence, such as learning to request juice at snack time. Generalizable skills are those that can be practiced and used in many different settings (Bricker & Cripe, 1992).

In activity-based intervention strategies, teachers consider how children's goals can be included in each classroom activity. An activity such as snack time provides opportunities for working on eating independently (a self-help goal), pouring juice (a fine motor goal), and requesting a food item (a communication goal). Teachers are responsible for preparing an environment that is stimulating for all children, not just those without disabilities. Regular and ongoing evaluation of each child's progress in meeting individual goals is also a critical component of activity-based intervention and other naturalistic approaches.

## IMPLICATIONS OF INTEGRATED PROGRAMS

Knowledge about the ways in which integrated programs can meet the needs of children and parents for high-quality early childhood education has grown significantly in the past 10 years. The active involvement of parents, regular and special education teachers, and administrators is now viewed as crucial in developing successful integrated preschool programs. Most regular education preschool teachers believe they are able to meet the needs of children with disabilities in their classes when intervention is supportive of their expertise and respects the educational approaches of the regular classroom.

New teaching strategies are being developed that meet the individualized needs of children with disabilities in inclusive classes. Researchers, parents, and practitioners are beginning to understand that participation in an inclusive preschool classroom influences nondisabled children's understanding of disabilities and sensitivity to their peers. The task now before the early childhood community is to find the best ways to provide education that is respectful of the talents and needs of individual children, parents, and teachers.

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# DIVERSE WAYS OF THINKING AND LEARNING

Teacher Story

*Cindy Creek*
*Rogers Elementary, Bloomington*

"Mrs. Creek, can we write a different ending to this story we just read?" "Can I add using 3 or 4 numbers instead of 2?" "Mrs. Creek, I have a great idea! What if we . . .?" One of the best ways to know what students are thinking is to really listen to their questions and comments. Their thoughts can give powerful ideas for a first grade curriculum.

The first grade classroom is a potpourri of inquiring minds. All the students come with an enormous variety of experiences. Some of the students enter having mastered many skills, while others are ready to embark into emergent literacy. These experiences have allowed them to develop different strengths.

The gifted and talented philosophy at our school reflects the belief that all children are gifted. It is our responsibility as educators to tap all the resources at hand. Designing a curriculum that encompasses the multiple intelligences can help create a profile of the "whole child." The multiple intelligences are logical-mathematical, linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, musical, spatial, bodily kinesthetic, and naturalist. Everyone is born with all the intelligences but will develop each according to cultural preferences and students' inclinations and experiences (Gardner, 1985).

In an active learning classroom, the curriculum demands the asking of open-ended questions by the children. Instead of filling out a simple worksheet after reading a story, perhaps students could engage in open-ended reading response questions. Students can create a math contract which allows them to work with hands-on activities at their instructional pace. The challenge for the teacher is to engage all students in meaningful learning. Learning activities must be able to address all ability levels and allow for each individual to work towards their learning potential.

Listening to your children while sharing a lesson or learning activity can open avenues and challenges that you may not have considered before. Acknowledging children's ideas can empower them to build upon their learning.

The next time one of your students asks, "If Martin Luther King died in 1968 and was born in 1929, how old was he when he died?" take them up on it. Individually or in cooperative learning groups, guide them into conversations of learning that can last a lifetime.

> *Giftedness comes in many forms. Is the child an unusually creative thinker? Artistic? Musical? Mentally Sharp? Good grades and giftedness are not the same thing.*
>
> *(Karnes & Johnson, 1989)*

# GIFTED CHILDREN

Having gifted students can be an exciting challenge. Effective teachers at all grade levels have found that students differ in the ways they learn best and, therefore, learn better when teachers vary approaches to learning. How to get the best performance from every student is a challenging task, especially in classrooms where there are many different levels of ability.

No one child has all the attributes or factors educators say are indicative of giftedness, but it is important for teachers to be aware of ways giftedness can be recognized and behaviors that may be unlike other children. "Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching, and counseling in order for them to develop optimally" (Morelock, 1992, p. 11).

Being out of sync both internally and externally is the definition for asynchrony. Gifted children usually develop cognitively at a much faster rate than physically and emotionally. "These children usually do not fit the developmental norms for their age; they have more advance play interests and often are academically far ahead of their age peers. The brighter the child, the greater the asynchrony and potential vulnerability" (Silverman, 1992).

Gifted children, as well other children, need classrooms where teachers adapt the curriculum and instruction to meet their needs and provide children with a wide range of activities and choices. A classroom with an open, flexible environment that allows choice time for children is very responsive to the needs of the gifted child. "The options should provide for a range of ability levels and interest areas. They can be varied by permitting the development of simple to complex *products* or by requiring lower to higher level *thinking processes*" (Kitano, 1989, p. 60). The teacher can help meet the needs of children by supporting individual instruction, enriching the environment, and encouraging curiosity and inquiry.

**Gifted children may demonstrate or possess various traits or characteristics**

**Positive Traits**

- unusual thinking; example, making up original games
- advanced knowledge; example, knows how the circulatory system works
- rapid learning rate; example, taught herself to read
- desire for new information; example, excitement about learning
- heightened sensitivity to thoughts and feelings of others; example, ability to analyze teacher's, parents', and peers' wishes

**Challenging Characteristics**

- impatience with regular curriculum and dislike of repetition; example, decreasing contributions, disruptive behavior
- poor relationships with same-age children; example, social isolation, avoidance of opportunities for social interaction
- difficulty conforming to group tasks; example, refusal to join groups
- unusual vulnerability to criticism; example, decreased achievement behavior to avoid error
- perceptions by others as being a "show off," example, hiding of talents (Kitano, 1989)

*"Virtually all kindergarten and primary teachers will encounter gifted children in their classrooms. The interactions of child characteristics, parent expectations, teacher attitudes and practices, and school policies determine the gifted child's adjustment in the regular classroom. The major responsibility for helping gifted children develop their potential logically falls to the teacher. Preschool, kindergarten, and primary teachers play a critical role in the development of young gifted children by identifying the gifted children in their class, offering a variety of activities to elicit and reinforce high-level responding, being sensitive to emotional vulnerabilities, and advocating for appropriate services. Accommodating individual needs presents challenges, but the rewards are worthwhile: preventing underachievement, experiencing the excitement of learning through a gifted child's eyes, and fostering the development of these children, too" (Kitano, 1989, p.63).*

**ERIC** Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Education
**Council for Exceptional Children**
1920 Association Drive
Reston, VA 20191-1589

Phone: (703) 264-9475
(800) 328-0272
TTY/TDD: (800) 328-0272
Fax: (703) 620-2521
E-mail: ericec@cec.sped.org

# NURTURING GIFTEDNESS IN YOUNG CHILDREN

*Wendy C.Roedell*

ERIC Digest #E487.

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Versions of the following conversation can often be heard when young gifted children start school. "Bill doesn't belong in kindergarten" the parent cries. "Look, he's reading at the fourth grade level and has already learned two-column addition." The teacher or principal, having already decided this is a "pushy parent," replies, "Well, Mrs. Smith, Bill certainly doesn't belong in first grade; he hasn't learned to tie his shoelaces, and he can't hold a pencil properly, and he had a tantrum yesterday in the hall."

The problem in this continuing controversy is that both parties are usually correct. Some gifted children entering kindergarten have acquired academic skills far beyond those of their age mates. Such children master the academic content of kindergarten when they are 3-years-old. However, their physical and social development may be similar to that of other 5-year-olds, making an accelerated placement a mismatch as well. The usual solution is to place a child like Bill in a program matched to his weaknesses, rather than his strengths. Bill usually ends up in kindergarten, where his advanced intellectual development becomes a frustration to his teacher, an embarrassment to his peers, and a burden to Bill.

Educators justify this placement by saying, "Bill needs socialization; he's already so far ahead academically, he doesn't need anything in that area." There are two major problems with this rationale. First, educators are essentially telling such students that there is no need for them to learn anything in school. The second problem is revealed by examining the so-called socialization experienced by a brilliant 5-year-old like Bill in a kindergarten class of 25 to 30 students. A major component of early socialization involves a child's feeling that she or he is accepted by others—teachers and children alike. If the teacher does not validate a gifted child's advanced abilities and intellectual interests by making them part of the ongoing curriculum, the child experiences no feelings of acceptance from the teacher. If, as is highly likely, this child makes the additional discovery that she or he is quite different from most classmates and that communication is extremely difficult because of differences in vocabulary and modes of expression, then the child misses peer acceptance as well. In fact, this first school experience, which should furnish the impetus for future enthusiasm about learning, can be a dismal failure for the brilliant child in a lockstep kindergarten program. Often these children learn to hide or deny their abilities so as to fit in better with the other children. Or, they may develop behavioral problems or psychosomatic symptoms such as stomachaches and headaches, causing parents to confront the school with justifiable concern.

## UNDERSTANDING UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT

It is important to remember that these children very often do not develop evenly. In fact, young gifted children frequently show peaks of extraordinary performance rather than equally high skill levels in all cognitive areas. The child who learns to read at age 3 or who shows unusually advanced spatial reasoning ability, for example, may not be the child with the highest IQ or the earliest language development. Unique patterns of development can be observed within a group of gifted children, and uneven development is frequently evident in the pattern of a single child. In some cases, it seems as though children's abilities develop in spurts, guided by changes in interest and opportunity. Reading ability, for example, might develop almost overnight. Children who know all their letters and letter sounds by age 2 1/2 may remain at that level for some time, perhaps until age 4 or 5, and then in a matter of months develop fluent reading skills at the third or fourth grade level.

Another area of unevenness in the development of gifted young children is found in the relationship between advanced intellectual development and development of physical and social skills. Evidence seems to indicate that intellectually gifted children's performance in the physical domain may only be advanced to the extent that the physical tasks involve cognitive organization. And, although intellectually advanced children tend to possess some advanced social-cognitive skills, they do not necessarily demonstrate those skills in their social behavior. In other words, they may understand how to solve social conflicts and interact cooperatively but not know how to translate their understanding into concrete behavior.

It is not uncommon to find gifted young children experiencing a vast gap between their advanced intellectual skills and their less advanced physical and emotional competencies. For example, 4- and 5-year-old children may converse intelligently about abstract concepts such as time and death and read fluently at the fourth grade level, yet find it difficult to hold a pencil or share their toys with others.

Often these uneven developmental levels can lead to extreme frustration, as children find that their limited physical skills are not sufficiently developed to carry out the complex projects they imagined. These children may throw tantrums or even give up on projects without trying. Adult guidance in developing coping strategies can help such children set more realistic goals for themselves and learn how to solve problems effectively when their original efforts do not meet their high expectations.

Adults, too, can be misled by children's advanced verbal ability or reasoning skill into expecting equally advanced behavior in all other areas. It is unsettling to hold a high-level conversation with a 5-year-old who then turns around and punches a classmate who stole her pencil. Sometimes young children's age-appropriate social behavior is interpreted as willful or lazy by parents and teachers whose expectations are unrealistically high. The only accurate generalization that can be made about the characteristics of intellectually gifted young children is that they demonstrate their unusual intellectual skills in a wide variety of ways and that they form an extremely heterogeneous group with respect to interests, skill levels in particular areas, social development, and physical abilities.

Understanding the unique developmental patterns often present in gifted young children can help both parents and teachers adjust their expectations of academic performance to a more reasonable level.

## CHOOSING A PROGRAM OR SCHOOL

One of the few psychological truths educators and psychologists agree on is that the most learning occurs when an optimal match between the learner's current understanding and the challenge of new learning material has been carefully engineered. Choosing a program or school for a gifted child who masters ideas and concepts quickly but behaves like a typical 4- or 5-year- old child is indeed a challenge.

Many intellectually gifted children master the cognitive content of most preschool and kindergarten programs quite early. They come to school ready and eager to learn concepts not usually taught until an older age. However, academic tasks designed for older children often require the learner to carry out teacher-directed activities while sitting still and concentrating on written worksheets. Young children, no matter how bright they are, require active involvement with learning materials and often do not have the writing skills required for above-grade-level work.

Since many gifted children will hide their abilities in order to fit in more closely with classmates in a regular program, teachers may not be able to observe advanced intellectual or academic abilities directly. If a kindergartner enters school with fluent reading ability, the parent should share this information at the beginning of the year instead of waiting until the end of the year to complain that the teacher did not find out that the child could read. When parents and teachers pool their observations of a child's skills, they begin to work together to develop appropriate educational options for nurturing those abilities. Parents whose children have some unusual characteristics that will affect their learning needs have an obligation to share that information with educators, just as educators have an obligation to listen carefully to parent concerns.

When the entry level of learners is generally high but extremely diverse, an appropriate program must be highly individualized. Children should be encouraged to progress at their own learning rate, which will result in most cases in subject matter acceleration. The program should be broadly based, with planned opportunities for development of social, physical, and cognitive skills in the informal atmosphere of an early childhood classroom.

One primary task of teachers is to make appropriately advanced content accessible to young children, taking into account individual social and physical skills. Lessons can be broken into short units, activities presented as games, and many concepts taught through inquiry-oriented dialogue and experimentation with manipulatable materials. Language experience activities in reading and the use of manipulatable mathematics materials, as described in products such as MATHEMATICS THEIR WAY (Baratta-Lorton, 1976), are good examples of appropriate curriculum approaches.

An appropriate learning environment should also offer a gifted young child the opportunity to discover true peers at an early age. Parents of gifted children frequently find that, while their child can get along with other children in the neighborhood, an intense friendship is likely to develop with a more developmentally equal peer met in a special class or interest-based activity. Such parents may be dismayed to discover that this best friend does not live next door but across town, and they may wonder whether or not to give in to their child's pleas for inconvenient visits. Probably one of the most supportive activities a parent can engage in is to help a child find a true friend and make the effort required to permit the friendship to flower.

In looking for an appropriate program for their gifted preschooler, then, parents must be aware of the learning needs of young children and not be misled by so-called experts who advocate rigid academic approaches with an emphasis on rote memorization and repetition. Rather, wise parents will look for open-endedness, flexible grouping, and opportunities for advanced activities in a program that allows their child to learn in the company of intellectual peers.

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Prepared by Wendy C. Roedell, Director, Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, Educational Service District 121, Seattle, Washington, and senior author of *GIFTED YOUNG CHILDREN.*

NOTE: Reprinted by permission of the publisher from Roedell, (1989). Early development of gifted children. In J. VanTassel-Baska, & P. Olszewski-Kubilius (Eds.), *Patterns of Influence on Gifted Learners, the Home, the Self, and the School* (pp. 13-28). (New York: Teachers College Press, 1989 by Teachers College, Columbia University. All rights reserved.)

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# CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING CURRICULUM

Voting Booth

## *All Learning is Social*

*We create knowledge through*
*our personal experiences.*

*We create knowledge through*
*the experiences of others.*

*We create knowledge through*
*sharing experiences with others.*

*We create knowledge through*
*collaborative interactions with others.*

*Vygotsky*

# CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING CURRICULUM

This chapter includes discussion and examples of various approaches to creating and implementing curriculum: thematic studies, inquiry studies, the Project Approach, arts infused, service-learning, and integration into class routines. The educators featured in this section are all continuing to work to create curriculum with their students that reflects developmentally appropriate practice.

## I. Creating and Developing Curriculum

☐ *Curriculum Planning: A Metaphor* by NAEYC and NAECS/SDE
☐ Teacher Story: *Arty Artery and Victor Vein* by Marlane Tisdale
☐ Creating Curriculum
☐ *Taking Stock of What You do to Promote Literacy* by S. Neuman, C. Copple, & S. Bredekamp
☐ *Improving Opportunities and Access to Mathematics Learning in the Early Years* by Yolanda N. Padrón

## II. Approaches to Implementing Curriculum

☐ **Thematic Studies**
☐ Teacher Story: *Questions About the Human Body: A Thematic Study* by Denise Ogren

☐ **Focused Inquiry Studies**
☐ Teacher Story: *An Experience with Focused Studies: Linking 1st and 5th Grades* by Cindy Creek
☐ A Conversation with Jerry Harste by Indiana University School of Education Alumni Association

**The Project Approach**
☐ *The Project Approach* by Lilian Katz
☐ Teacher Story: *Introduction to the Project Approach* by Candy Ganzel
☐ Teacher Story: *Shoes, Shoes, Shoes - A Project* by Candy Ganzel & Jan Stuglik

**Arts Infused**
☐ *Kaleidoscope: Building an Arts Infused Elementary Curriculum* by Jan Radford, Susan Snyder, and N. Carlotta Parr

**Service-Learning in the Early Years**
☐ *Service-Learning Project* by Youth Resources of Southwestern Indiana
☐ *Service-Learning in the Early Childhood Classroom* by Roxanne Rowley

**Class Routines as Part of the Curriculum**
☐ Teacher Story: *Through the Eyes of Writers* by Marolyn Krauss
☐ Teacher Story: *The Birthday Chart as a Demonstration Writing Lesson* by Denise Ogren
☐ *Adding Movement Throughout the Day* by Laurie Rodger
☐ Teacher Story: *Mini-Economy* by Glenna Myers
☐ Questions to Consider when Assessing Curriculum

## III. Creating and Implementing Curriculum References and Resources

# I. Creating and Developing Curriculum

## CURRICULUM PLANNING: A METAPHOR

There are many legitimate approaches to curriculum planning, just as there are many ways to plan a menu. For example, in meal planning, one can be guided by knowledge of nutrition derived from theory and research. Meals planned from this perspective will undoubtedly be nourishing. Without attention given to the interests and preferences of the diner, however, the nourishing meal may go uneaten. Some menus are based simply on what the eaters like. Again, without attention to the nutritional needs, the meal may be consumed but provide less value. Some menus are planned by flipping through the cookbook and picking what sounds interesting or fun. Again, this random approach may or may not result in healthy outcomes. Lastly, many meals are planned by going to the cupboard and seeing what is there. If the food on hand is fresh and nutritious, the outcome may by chance be positive. If only junk food is available, however, the meal will be composed of empty calories.

As in menu planning, curriculum can be derived from many sources, and the outcomes can vary enormously. Curriculum should be based on sound theoretical principles of how children develop and learn, but it must also be derived from the needs and interests of individual children if it is to be fully effective. For example, if food is served that is very different from children's experiences at home, they may reject it and fail to obtain its nutritional benefits. The same result may occur when curriculum is not relevant to children's family backgrounds and cultures.

Overemphasis on preferences and interests, however, in the absence of clear goals and objectives, can lead to haphazard curriculum planning that may or may not achieve worthwhile outcomes. Too often, early childhood programs have been criticized as ineffective learning environments because they have emphasized children's play without articulating the goals for children, the value of play for learning, or the essential role of the teacher in planning the environment and facilitating learning through play. A fine balance must be achieved in planning curriculum for young children. On one hand, teachers may err by not doing enough planning to stimulate children's learning (the milling-around model), but if their activity is dictated by the plans, the teacher may fail to adapt to individual differences and interests (Jones, 1989).

Unfortunately, the cookbook approach is all too common in early childhood programs. In fact, activity books abound that frequently serve as the only curriculum guide. As in menu planning, the individual recipes may be appropriate and valuable, but without a framework and organization, they may fail to provide the opportunity for rich conceptual development that is likely with a more coherent, thoughtful approach.

Lastly, curriculum may be implemented using the cupboard approach. This approach is totally dependent on the appropriateness of the available materials and activities. If they are basically age appropriate, then the result is not harmful but not optimal. If they are inappropriate and even trivial, as is much of available commercial curricula, then they are a waste of children's and teachers' time.

Curriculum should be planned based on the best knowledge of theory, research, and practice about how children develop and learn, with attention given to the individual needs and interests in a group in relation to program goals.

(Source: (1990). *Guidelines for Appropriate Curriculum Content and Assessment in Programs Serving Children Ages 3 through 8: A Position Statement of the National Association of the Education of Young Children & the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education*.)

# ARTY ARTERY AND VICTOR VEIN

*Marlane Tisdale*
*MSD Warren Township, Indianapolis*

One February morning many years ago, the children in my classroom were busily engaged in activities throughout the room. We had been studying about the human body and the importance of eating proper foods to keep our bodies healthy. Several children were stretched out on the floor tracing each others bodies on tag paper. Others were researching information on the human body in the classroom library. Mindy, David, Barbara, and Sue were sitting around the writing center writing invitations to parents to come to a Healthy Snack Party. A group of children were at the cooking center cleaning veggies and fruits to serve at the party.

From across the room came the ring of my classroom bell, which was to be rung only for special announcements from the teacher or if a child had made a discovery that he wished to share with the class. It was Phillip who had something to share. He asked his friends to come over to the easel and proceeded to tell his story in pictures (with labels) of Victor Vein and Arty Artery and how they work in relationship to the heart. The young audience was glued to Phillip's amazingly accurate story.

What a wonderful example of children constructing knowledge through meaningful ways! Oh, yes, I can't forget to mention that Phillip is now living in New York City and is a leading cardiologist.

## CREATING CURRICULUM

"Curriculum in the primary (grades) should be viewed in the broadest possible terms. Virtually everything that happens in a child's life involves learning, whether explicitly identified as such or not. Curriculum in the primary (grades) should be viewed in the same way. All planned activities, including classroom work, field trips, organized play, sports, and even routine meals are integral parts of any early childhood curriculum.

In far too many primary schools today, curriculum is defined in much narrower, academic terms. The result is a primary school experience that is developmentally inappropriate for many children. The effects of such inappropriate experiences on later school success can be dramatic. A recent study by the District of Columbia of 461 children over a period of seven years concluded that, in both pre-school and the primary grades,

> Overly academic learning experiences impact negatively on children's ability to successfully transition from the primary grades to upper elementary . . . children's academic and developmental progress through school is enhanced by more active, child-initiated early learning experiences. Their progress is slowed by the "escalated curriculum" which introduces formal learning experiences too early for most children's developmental status.

Children in this study who had participated in developmentally appropriate early childhood education programs, whether their first formal learning experiences were in pre-school or in kindergarten, were found to perform consistently better in fourth grade math, reading, language, spelling, and science than those who had experienced academically-oriented or even mixed academic/developmental programs"

(From *Getting Schools Ready for Children*, p. 10, by Southern Regional Education Board. 1994, Atlanta, GA: SREB. Reprinted with permission.)

Curriculum is not, merely, a list of things to be covered from textbooks, manuals and guides. "The ideas coming from curriculum developers, administrators, and other experts outside the classroom are not ignored but do not solely determine what occurs in the classroom. Instead, insights from these experts outside the classroom are part of the knowledge that the experts inside the classroom (teachers and students) use as they think and work together" (Short & Burke, 1991, p. 5). Developmentally appropriate curriculum is based upon three areas:

1. *What is known about child development and learning* - knowledge of age-related human characteristics that permits general predictions within an age range about what activities, materials, interactions, or experiences will be safe, healthy, interesting, achievable, and also challenging to children;
2. *What is known about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child in the group* to be able to adapt for and be responsive to inevitable individual variation;
3. *Knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live* to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for the participating children and their families (NAEYC, 1996).

There is not one developmentally appropriate curriculum. Rather, these three areas should be reflected in the way curriculum is created and implemented. Curriculum of the developmentally appropriate classroom is one that uses conceptual organizers, such as themes, units, and projects and is informed by child development knowledge, subject matter disciplines, and the individual children's needs and backgrounds (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992). The 1990 guidelines for curriculum content, from NAEYC and National Association of Early childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE), are outlined below:

1. The curriculum has an articulated description of its theoretical base that is consistent with prevailing professional opinion and research on how children learn.
2. Curriculum content is designed to achieve long-range goals for children in all domains—social, emotional, cognitive, and physical—and to prepare children to function as fully contributing members of a democratic society.
3. Curriculum addresses the development of knowledge and understanding, process and skills, dispositions and attitudes.
4. Curriculum addresses a broad range of content that is relevant, engaging, and meaningful to children.
5. Curriculum goals are realistic and attainable for most children in the designated age range for which they were designed.
6. Curriculum content reflects and is generated by the needs and interests of individual children within the group. Curriculum incorporates a wide variety of learning experiences, materials and equipment, and instructional strategies, to accommodate a broad range of children's individual differences in prior experience, maturation rates, styles of learning, needs, and interests.
7. Curriculum respects and supports individual, cultural, and linguistic diversity. Curriculum supports and encourages positive relationships with children's families.
8. Curriculum builds upon what children already know and are able to do (activating prior knowledge) to consolidate their learning and to foster their acquisition of new concepts and skills.
9. The curriculum provides conceptual frameworks for children so that their mental constructions based on prior knowledge and experience become more complex over time.
10. Curriculum allows for focus on a particular topic or content while allowing for integration across traditional subject-matter divisions by planning around themes and/or learning experiences that provide opportunities for rich conceptual development.
11. The curriculum content has intellectual integrity; content meets the recognized standards of the relevant subject-matter disciplines.

12. The content of the curriculum is worth knowing; curriculum respects children's intelligence and does not waste their time.

13. Curriculum engages children actively, not passively, in the learning process. Children have opportunities to make meaningful choices.

14. Curriculum values children's constructive errors and does not prematurely limit exploration and experimentation for the sake of ensuring "right" answers.

15. Curriculum emphasizes the development of children's thinking, reasoning, decision-making, and problem-solving abilities.

16. Curriculum emphasizes the value of social interaction to learning in all domains and provides opportunities to learn from peers.

17. Curriculum is supportive of children's physiological needs for activity, sensory stimulation, fresh air, rest, hygiene, and nourishment/elimination.

18. Curriculum protects children's psychological safety, that is, children feel happy, relaxed, and comfortable rather than disengaged, frightened, worried, or stressed.

19. The curriculum strengthens children's sense of competence and enjoyment of learning by providing experiences for children to succeed from their point of view.

20. The curriculum is flexible so that teachers can adapt to individual children or groups.

# TAKING STOCK OF WHAT YOU DO TO PROMOTE LITERACY

(Excerpt from *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children*, by S. Neuman, C. Copple, & S. Bredekamp. Washington, DC: NAEYC, 1999, p. 97-99. Reprinted by permission.)

This inventory is provided to help each of us to take stock, to examine our curriculum and classroom and consider whether we're doing everything we can to help children learn to read and write. Clearly, teaching practices should be varied according to the ages and developmental levels of the learners, and this brief overview could not capture that level of detail. The practices and strategies listed in the Taking Stock inventory are useful throughout the preschool and early grades.

## THE POWER AND PLEASURE OF LITERACY

**Do you...**

- ☐ Read daily to children in your class?
- ☐ Engage children in selecting favorite books and participating actively in story time?
- ☐ Find ways to encourage parents to read to their children at home?
- ☐ Link books and reading experiences with engaging activities that stretch children's learning?
- ☐ Show children the many ways that reading and writing can be used in daily activities?
- ☐ Include literacy props and materials in dramatic play areas?

## THE LITERATE ENVIRONMENT

**Do you...**

- ☐ Put labels, captions, and other print in places where they serve a purpose?
- ☐ Create inviting places for children to read with their friends or on their own?
- ☐ Include a wide variety of books and print materials that affirm children's cultures and linguistic backgrounds?
- ☐ Place books where children can easily reach them?
- ☐ Display books on open shelves to pique children's interest in reading?
- ☐ Rotate and refresh literacy materials in dramatic play areas to keep children's interest and imaginations lively?

## LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

**Do you...**

- ☐ Respond to what children do and say by building on their ideas and language?
- ☐ Include new words in your conversations with children?
- ☐ Name objects and actions, giving children a brief explanation where necessary?
- ☐ Engage children in language games, rhymes, and riddles?
- ☐ Encourage dramatic play and sometimes join in to introduce new possibilities?
- ☐ Create opportunities for children to engage in interactive activities in small groups?

## KNOWLEDGE OF PRINT

- ☐ Show children that we read print moving from left to right and top to bottom?
- ☐ Identify the features of a book, such as the author and title?
- ☐ Point to words, labels, and letters and read or name them?
- ☐ Help children to recognize and write their names?
- ☐ Draw attention to uppercase and lowercase letters, punctuation, and other print features?

## BUILDING KNOWLEDGE AND COMPREHENSION

**Do you...**

- ☐ Give children many opportunities to explore and manipulate objects?
- ☐ Read and make available information books and other nonfiction?
- ☐ Introduce new vocabulary and concepts before going on special field trips?
- ☐ Debrief and discuss with children what they have learned after a field trip or other special activity?
- ☐ Ensure that there are abundant opportunities for children to share and assimilate knowledge through play?
- ☐ Ask children questions and respond to their questions?
- ☐ Identify and explain new words across the curriculum?

## TYPES OF TEXT

**Do you...**

- ☐ Read and reread stories to give children a chance to become very familiar with them?
- ☐ Encourage children to retell or reenact stories in their own words?
- ☐ Engage children in dramatic play and acting out favorite stories?
- ☐ Find meaningful ways to introduce children to a range of writing forms and genres?
- ☐ Help children to write in different ways for different purposes?

## PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

**Do you...**

☐ Draw children's attention to the sounds they hear in words?

☐ Play a variety of games that emphasize rhyming and beginning sounds?

☐ Read and reread stories that have predictable sound patterns?

☐ Provide children with time to write on their own each day?

☐ Sing, rhyme, and clap out the syllables of songs and chants?

☐ Build word walls of words with similar sound patterns?

☐ Use daily classroom routines to talk about words and songs?

## LETTERS AND WORDS

**Do you...**

☐ Read alphabet books and help children identify letters?

☐ Write and display children's names and other words of particular interest?

☐ Involve children in writing activities?

☐ Demonstrate the writing process through shared writing activities?

☐ Make paper, pencils, and markers easily accessible?

☐ Encourage children to try to spell words out independently as they write?

☐ Give specific help in learning sound patterns?

☐ Help children to learn new words?

☐ Help children acquire a basic sight vocabulary?

# Improving Opportunities and Access to Mathematics Learning in the Early Years

Yolanda N. Padrón

(Reprinted with permission from *Mathematics in the Early Years*, 1999, by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.)

Jackson Elementary School is a large school with a prekindergarten program that serves predominantly Latino students. It is located in a metropolitan inner-city neighborhood that is considered one of the poorest in the city. Nearly all the students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Jackson School's grounds and facilities are clean; there are no visible signs of graffiti or vandalism anywhere. A tour of the building would also give a positive impression of a well-run, efficient school. Jackson Elementary, however, does have several problems, in particular one that exists in many urban schools—poor quality of instruction.

After I observed several classrooms, it was apparent that teachers typically spent a great deal of time on drill-and-practice techniques for teaching mathematics. There was needless repetition of previously covered skills and concepts. There was little group work, and there were no in-depth or authentic mathematics learning experiences. There was very little emphasis on higher-order cognitive skill and little teacher enthusiasm and warmth toward students. In addition, students were not given much opportunity to interact with one another or with the teacher. One of the saddest observations of all, however, was the fact that there were several monolingual Spanish-speaking students in each of the classes I visited and, in every class, their teachers totally ignored them.

Although the clean and neat setting of this school may not be typical of all inner-city schools, the description of this school does reflect previous findings related to the type of instruction that diverse student populations typically experience. There is evidence that race and economic status affect the quality of instruction that students receive. In addition, as has been studied, this type of instruction contributes to the lack of success of diverse students (Garcia 1994).

The experiences that children have during the three-to-five-year age period are important factors in their later development and school achievement (New 1998). The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) (1989) has pointed to the importance of mathematics education for *every* child. Considering the importance of early experiences and mathematics education, we must continue to identify instructional practices that provide quality instruction for every child. How can instructional practices, like those described at Jackson Elementary School, be changed so that young children who come from low-income families and families of various languages and cultural backgrounds can receive an equitable education in mathematics?

Generally, the issue of achieving equity in mathematics has not been addressed because many educators believe that mathematics is color-blind or that it is not language bound. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss current standards and reforms related to mathematics instruction as they relate to achieving equity. The chapter also provides several suggestions for incorporating instructional practices that may help children master high levels of skill and knowledge in mathematics, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, and language background. These practices may help provide an equitable education to young children and thereby help them in achieving educational equity.

### The Need for Equity in Mathematics Instruction: Current Standards and Reforms

The findings from various reports have indicated that the mathematics achievement among children who come from various cultural and language backgrounds and lower-income families is very poor (Secada 1992; Khisty1995). Although some reports have indicated that the gap in mathematics achievement for African-American students is narrowing, a closer look reveals that these students are doing better on items testing the mastery of low-level and basic skills (Secada 1992). Similarly, Hispanic students continue to perform at lower levels than white and Asian American students (Secada 1992), although the gap is narrowing. Although some achievement gains are promising, there still are inequities that need to be addressed.

Why do children from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds and those from low-income families continue to lag behind in mathematics achievement? One explanation may be the type of instructional practices these students experience. Oakes (1990), for example, has found that lower-income minority students are more likely to be placed in low-track classes in which they have less access to a full mathematics curriculum. In addition, instruction for language-minority students may focus less on mathematics instruction and more on language development. In order for educational equity to be achieved, instructional practices that elicit the best possible learning experiences must be implemented for all children so that mathematics learning can be attained by every child. These "equitable practices honor each student's unique qualities and experiences" (NCTM 1995, p.15).

One reason for the tremendous urgency in addressing this problem is that the number of children from racially and ethnically diverse families will continue to constitute a large percentage of the total school population. Changes in demographics for school-aged children have indicated that the white student population has decreased 12 percent while the African American population has decreased approximately 4 percent (Tate 1997). The Hispanic school-aged population, however, has increased 57 percent (National Science Foundation 1994). The total number of poor children has also increased. Poor children are also becoming more racially and ethnically diverse; that is, the number of poor white children has declined while the number of poor Latino, African American, and Native American children has increased (Miller 1995). African American children, however, still experience the highest rate of poverty (Miller 1995).

Projections for the year 2000 and beyond indicate that people of color will compose a large percentage of the student population (Cushner, McClelland, and Safford 1992). Several estimates project that the number of school-aged children from various language backgrounds will reach about 3.4 million by the year 2000 (Khisty 1995). Projections for the year 2000 also indicate that Spanish-speaking students will constitute approximately 77 percent of the total language-minority student population (National Center for Education Statistics 1981). Although these changes in demographics will affect many aspects of our society, the most severe impact appears to be on the education of children.

Recent calls to restructure education in the United States indicate that the present educational system is not effective and that changes are needed; these are calls for reform for all students, from all backgrounds, to learn mathematics. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (1989, pp.5-6), for example, has indicated the following goals for all students: (a) to learn and reason mathematically, (b) to learn to communicate mathematically, (c) to become confident in their mathematical abilities, and (d) to become mathematical problem solvers. In addition, the *National Education Goals Panel Report: Building a Nation of Learners* (National Education Goals Panel 1995) has stated that mathematics achievement should increase significantly for all students. In reference to minority students, the report states that minority students should be represented in each quartile, reflecting the student population as a whole. A more recent report, *The National Education Goals Panel Report: Ready to Learn* (National Education Goals Panel 1998) states that "ready schools are committed to the success of every child" (p.12). Such schools respond to the child's individual needs, provide an environment conducive to learning, and finally maintain an awareness of the impact that poverty and race have on the education available to children (pp.12-13). One of the shortcomings with these calls for reform has been that they have not specifically addressed how equity can best be achieved for students from diverse populations. It is important that the issue of equity be addressed if students from diverse populations are to achieve these standards.

The projected increases in the number of students from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds and their lower achievement in mathematics make it important that we develop more equitable instructional approaches for teaching young students who come from families whose language and culture differ from that of the mainstream culture. These instructional practices should focus on improving children's higher level thinking, rather than simply increasing students' mastery of basic skills. This will require teachers to be flexible when using instructional practices so that they will be able to respond to the diversity that exists in each classroom. This flexibility will help in meeting the individual needs of all the young learners in the class.

## Developing Equitable Instructional Programs

One aim of the NCTM's *Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics* (1989) has been the improvement of problem-solving skills. What instructional practices need to be incorporated in the learning environment to improve the problem-solving skills of young children from diverse populations? How can instruction provide all students with better access to educational opportunities? Several suggestions can be offered so that more effective instruction can be provided to all children. The following subsections provide suggestions for instructional practices that have been found to be effective with students from diverse populations. These instructional practices, for example, not only consider cultural differences but also take into account language differences that the students bring to the classroom. Suggestions for more equitable instructional practices include (a) integrating the child's native language and culture, (b) using students' prior knowledge, and (c) addressing teachers' attitudes and beliefs about diverse populations. By providing equitable instruction, teachers give students the opportunity to learn in a way best suited to helping them attain achievement in mathematics.

### Integrating the Child's Native Language and Culture Into Mathematics Instruction

As part of a discussion of the sociocultural environment of learning, it is important to examine the match between the cultural background and the classroom learning environment of young children from diverse populations. Turning sociocultural diversity into a "positive" may help these children stay in school. Incorporating the student's culture and language, for example, provides social support to the students and validates their language and culture. Incorporating the various cultures and languages of students also provides other students with the opportunity to learn about different cultures and languages. When incorporating diverse cultures in the classroom, however, each student must be accepted as an individual; that is, it should not be assumed that because a student belongs to a particular cultural group, he or she follows all the customs and beliefs of that culture. General acceptance of the student's culture can provide for a supportive environment. Clearly, it would be difficult for teachers to become experts in every culture, but teachers need to develop an attitude of interest and learning about others' cultures.

Although there are conflicting opinions about the effectiveness of bilingual education programs, several studies have found that programs incorporating the students' language and culture are beneficial (Casanova and Arias 1993). Studies examining bilingual and bicultural programs have found that participation in such programs improves literacy skills, attendance, and students' self-concept. One of the factors considered important for achieving educational excellence and equity for language-minority students is the development of *native* language skills (Hakuta 1986); whenever possible, the use of the *native* language is recommended. Nonetheless, many second language students do not participate in programs where their native language is used; rather they are enrolled in English-monolingual programs (LaCelle-Peterson and Rivera 1994). It is important that second-language students receive instruction that meets both their linguistic and academic needs.

Discourse strategies are crucial in the learning of mathematics (NCTM 1991), particularly for young children in the process of acquiring knowledge and skills in the language. Discourse strategies, for example, that emphasize student-student interaction are important in enhancing linguistic development (García 1983). One discourse strategy that would promote mathematics achievement for young children includes posing questions that require children to justify their responses or provide solutions to challenging problems (NCTM 1991). This type of instruction not only acknowledges the students' active role in the learning process (García 1994), but it also changes the role of teachers. Rather than cast themselves as the experts who bestow knowledge on their students (Freire 1970), teachers can provide many opportunities for their students to participate actively in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It must be noted that instruction that engages students in rich discourse requires an environment that respects each individual child's thinking and reasoning about mathematics (NCTM 1991).

### Benefits of Incorporating Children's Culture and Language Into the Learning Environment

*Use of the Students' Language in Developing Activities*

Language development means providing students with various and numerous opportunities to use language in a variety of situations. For example, students should work in small groups, student-student dyads, and teacher-student dyads. Students also should be provided with opportunities to use language for a variety of purposes, including activities such as having students engage in dialogues, explain solutions, formulate questions, and use language for higher-level thinking. Open-ended problem-solving discussions engage students actively and encourage them to use what they know to construct mathematical concepts. These situations will expose students to a variety of language and will also force students to use language in a variety of situations.

For linguistically different students, teachers must remember that learning a second language is a difficult and time-consuming task. Teachers can provide children with an environment in which they feel comfortable trying their new language. Also, some children acquire oral English proficiency more quickly than others. Everyday English proficiency, however, is not the same type of proficiency that students need to complete academic work. Academic language proficiency may take five to seven years to acquire. The students' use of the native language can also aid in the development of the newer language, generally contributing to students' appreciation of their native culture.

***Use of the Students' Culture in Developing Activities***

According to Tharp (1989), improvements in basic skills, social skills, and problem solving occur when the student's native culture patterns are matched with instruction. Since individuals from different cultural groups perceive experiences differently, students' cultures may affect their preferred modes of learning. Programs with Native-American and African-American students, for example, have proved successful when the instructional environment included activities and teacher-student interactions compatible with the students' cultural backgrounds (Tharp 1989; Ladson-Billings 1995). In teaching mathematical representation to Native-American children, for example, instructional programs can be developed to take advantage of their strong visual-spatial skills and their tendency to learn best by doing and observing. For African-American students, instruction may include aspects of their culture such as the use of rhythm, oral expression, and movement (Ladson-Billings 1997). In both of these instances, the culture of the children is used to structure the learning environment so that they are able to construct relationships and learn mathematics with understanding.

Like Native-American students, Hispanic students tend to prefer cooperative rather than competitive learning situations that mirror the cooperative attitudes characteristic of work patterns in their homes and communities. For Hispanics, for example, the social organization is based on collaboration, cooperation, extended families, and older children taking care of siblings. Instruction for this group, therefore, may include the need for small groups and peer teaching with a great deal of interaction. Organizing learning activities in which students work in cooperative groups provides for diversity of learning styles. Placing students in small cooperative groups may lower the anxiety that some students feel when they have to perform alone. In addition, instructional programs should provide opportunities for students to work individually with the teacher.

### Using Students' Prior Knowledge In Mathematics Instruction

Contextualized instruction enables students to link new information to prior knowledge. Prior knowledge provides the scaffolding that children need to take them from what they know to what they do not know. Prior knowledge plays a powerful role in comprehension and learning. The use of the students' experiences can make mathematics more relevant. Therefore, prior knowledge is an essential ingredient in designing instructional programs for students from diverse populations. Differences in this knowledge base are likely to affect the susceptibility to instruction. For example, in order for a child to learn a new idea in mathematics, the child must be able to relate it to previously acquired knowledge. This provides for a context in which the mathematics can be embedded and can become meaningful to the child. The Navajo language, for example, does not have words for *divide* and *if* (Bradley 1984); without this conceptual language, it would be difficult for the child to relate to these concepts and the mathematics becomes irrelevant.

### Addressing Teachers' Attitudes and Beliefs about Diverse Populations

Clearly, effective teachers need to have a substantive knowledge of mathematics in order to create a challenging mathematical context that will actively engage students. In addition to this knowledge base, teachers' attitudes toward diversity need to be addressed if teachers are to provide culturally and linguistically relevant instruction. They must learn to accept as well as appreciate the cultural and linguistic differences that young children bring to the learning environment.

Educators who do not confront their own prejudices and biases may contribute to the inequitable treatment of children. Their misperceptions of students may cause them to treat low-achieving students differently. This exists when teachers, for example, call on language-minority students only to answer low-level knowledge questions or when teachers do not give students with limited English proficiency opportunities to develop higher-order-thinking skills. Research suggests that expectations set for students are important in determining students' achievement, and that low expectations may be harming disadvantaged students. In mathematics, for example, research indicates that in as many as a third of all mathematics classes, teacher behaviors sustain the poor performance of low achievers (Good and Biddle 1988); teachers might raise the achievement of students by raising their own expectations of students and giving them more instructional attention (Fullerton 1995).

### The Role of Teachers

Teachers of ethnic-minority students need to be warm and caring, but at the same time they must have high expectations for their students' academic success (Waxman 1992). If teachers present a classroom where students feel comfortable and accepted, students will also sense that their participation is valued. Teachers should provide students with opportunities to work on challenging tasks and include them in cooperating groups. Students need to be viewed as highly capable and able to take on challenging tasks. It is just as important for children from diverse populations to develop content knowledge and higher-level-thinking skills as it is for English-monolingual students. If students of diverse but disadvantaged backgrounds are to be successful in academic settings, these skills will need to be developed.

The teacher, in this type of setting, is instrumental in establishing an equitable learning environment. The teacher becomes a facilitator of the learning process, helping students go beyond what they can achieve by themselves to what they can achieve with the help of a more capable adult or peer. In this type of learning environment, content needs to be personally meaningful, contextually relevant, and built on rather than replacing existing competencies. In addition to helping children learn the content, teachers need to provide the opportunity to learn by allowing students to interact in small groups. In these small groups students would be able to do a variety of activities, such as developing problem-solving skills by generating and testing hypotheses. This type of instructional program will help students to develop higher-level-thinking skills and can open the doors for students to attain academic success.

### Concluding Remarks

Outward appearances are often deceiving, which was true of Jackson Elementary School. The efficiency of the school, even its cleanliness, indicated that all was well, including students' achievement. However, inside Jackson Elementary, students were receiving instruction that did little to enhance their levels of achievement in mathematics. In this chapter, I have reviewed some issues related to achieving equity in mathematics instruction and have provided some suggestions for improving instructional practices. Teachers of children from diverse populations may want to implement some of the instructional practices presented here:

- Create a supportive environment that is linguistically and cognitively rich.
- Create various opportunities for cooperative learning.
- Ask higher-level questions that require thinking.

- Build on prior knowledge.
- Incorporate the student's first language and culture whenever possible.

When teachers facilitate access to instructional strategies that promote critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, some of the barriers to academic success faced by these students may be removed (Padrón and Waxman 1993). In addition, teachers need to become more aware of their own biases and prejudices. It is important that these biases and prejudices be acknowledged so that these beliefs and attitudes do not jeopardize the children's access to educational opportunities.

Our goal in educating children should be to encourage *all* children to become independent thinkers and learners and have the confidence, skills, and knowledge to solve problems. Fulfilling this goal for disadvantaged students requires instructional practices appropriate to a positive perception of disadvantaged students' being capable of learning. Some have erroneously judged that English language learners are incapable of learning content until they have mastered the English language fully. Last, but perhaps most important, there can never be equality of educational opportunity as long as attitudes exist that perceive students from diverse populations as having less need for thinking skills than white children. All children can become successful, self-directed learners if they are given effective strategies and the opportunity to learn. We need to educate *all* students with the necessary thinking skills that will help them help themselves.

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# THEMATIC STUDIES

Thematic studies incorporate multiple curricular areas through a general or specific theme. The thematic study is developed by taking into consideration child development principles; the children's needs, interests, and strengths; the teacher's interests; the cultural context of the school community; and local and state guidelines. Teachers that create an excessively theme-driven curriculum may lose sight of these critical considerations.

Thematic studies, like any other curricular organizer, are not automatically developmentally appropriate. "Child development research tells us that when concepts and ideas are too far removed from a child's first-hand experience they have little meaning. Information that is memorized without purpose or significance has no lasting value. Children have to build on what they know and connect new information to the familiar . . . Before studying American or world history, they can study their families, communities, towns, or cities to learn about how people function in groups and communities" (Bickart, et. al., 1997, p. 78).

To be relevant, a thematic study must take into account the interests of the children in the class. The study should be planned collaboratively with the children. General ideas and possibilities can certainly be explored ahead of time. However, the final selection should not be made until after the teacher has had a chance to meet her/his students and ascertain their needs and interests.

A thematic study and the activities should have intellectual integrity relevant to the knowledge base of the disciplines and be something worth knowing (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992). There "are examples of curriculum that is trivial, meaningless, and wastes children's time, such as a month-long kindergarten unit on teddy bears. Equally disturbing are examples of curriculum that has been oversimplified to the point of inaccuracy or activities that misrepresent reality or create confusion rather than clarity" (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992, p. 39).

It is important that the activities planned for the theme are not artificial and contrived. The purpose of a theme is to make the content meaningful to the students so they have an understanding how learning and knowledge connect. The more real the activities, the more the children will see the connections. "An example of an activity that lacks intellectual integrity was done by S. Bredekamp as an inexperienced teacher with her preschool class. The children were engaged in a study of "myself" that included several activities about faces. The teacher planned what she thought was the 'cutest' activity - to make potato-head faces. She had seen in a book how the top of the potato could be cut off and replaced with cotton balls on which grass seed could be grown, with proper watering, to simulate hair! The teacher spent several days engaged in this activity, rushing in each morning to see if the grass (hair) had grown overnight, hoping that the seeds would sprout before the potatoes rotted. Unlike the teacher, the children failed to engage with this activity at all, and she had to literally beg them to look at the potato heads each day before she finally threw them away.

The potato-head activity had many problems, but its primary fault seems to lie in its lack of intellectual integrity. Grass doesn't grow on cotton balls, grass doesn't grow on potatoes, and potatoes don't grow hair! It seems fortunate that the children did *not* engage with this project because if they had, it is hard to imagine what learning would have resulted and what relationship that learning would have had to reality. The potato head and teddy bears are examples of curriculum that appear to be active and hands-on and, therefore, are assumed - inaccurately - to be developmentally appropriate. Unless the content of the curriculum activity or project has a sound foundation in the knowledge base and has intellectual integrity, its inclusion is not justified" (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992, p. 39).

Learning about diverse cultural contexts should not be treated "as additions to the 'regular' curriculum—where cultures other than mainstream European

American are brought into the classroom from time to time" (Derman-Sparks, 1992, p. 115) often in the form of a thematic study or unit. "Tourist multicultural curriculum is inappropriate in several ways. . . .Consider, for example, typical activities used to teach children about 'Indian' culture: making 'fry bread,' playing in a tepee, reading a folktale with illustrations of life in the past, and dressing up at Thanksgiving as Indians with feather 'headdresses." These activities reinforce the misconception held by preschool children all over the United States that 'all Indians are the same' (for example, they all live in tepees, wear feathers, eat the same foods, and lived in the past) . . .

. . . Second, tourist curriculum too often does not have intellectual integrity. To make activities about culture (a complex subject) manageable for young children, discrete, small 'pieces of culture' are disconnected from their overall context. In the process, activities misrepresent, trivialize, and stereotype the cultures they are designed to 'teach' about. For example, having preschoolers do sand painting to learn about 'Indian' culture, an activity suggested in several curriculum guides, makes all three mistakes. Sand painting is part of a serious healing ritual practiced by learned adults, not a 'fun,' sensory art activity; moreover, it is not practiced by all Native-American peoples. Disconnecting pieces of culture from their overall context results in curriculum that does not respect and support diversity within a culture or the needs and interests of individual children within a group" (Derman-Sparks, 1992, p.115-116). The intention is not that teachers should be wary of teaching about other cultures, but that they do so thoughtfully. There are many resources that can assist educators in planning developmentally and contextually appropriate antibias, multicultural curriculum.

Growth as an educator is an ongoing process. Sue Bredekamp, the inexperienced preschool teacher who made potato-head faces, is the past director of professional development for NAEYC. "Teaching is never about 'getting it right.' It's about inquiry: using children as our curricular informants to continue to grow and learn as professionals" (Short, Harste and Burke, 1996, p. 4). The following story is written by an Indiana kindergarten teacher who uses her ever growing knowledge of developmentally appropriate practice in creating thematic studies with her students.

**Teacher Story**

# QUESTIONS ABOUT THE HUMAN BODY: A THEMATIC STUDY

*Denise Ogren*
*Edgewood Early Childhood Center, Ellettsville*

### Finding the Interest

"What are we going to study next?" That's the question the children and I explore every year in January. I try to get a consensus of a variety of topics or themes that my kindergartners want to explore. When I had older students in my building to help, I could let each child select a different topic, theme, or question to explore. Now that the kindergarten rooms are isolated in a separate facility, I use parent assistance. I try to do group topics, themes, and questions allowing each child to explore specific questions within the general theme that everyone has chosen.

By January, I have some ideas of the interests of my students from what has taken place during their play and class discussions. I make up a questionnaire listing a variety of topics, themes, and questions that I feel capable of handling within the kindergarten classroom, that are consistent with what I know about child development, and that include what is suggested to be taught by the state and my particular school. Some of these areas include: animals, plants, favorite authors, health (doctors, nurses, dentists, my body, nutrition), vehicles, water and the environment, fairy tales, space, friends, people of other countries, and art and artists. I send an interest survey home for the children to fill out with their parents' help. From the results, I develop the curriculum topics and themes for the rest of the school year.

One fall, I read the article, "The Bodyworks: Inside Me - Another Approach to Being Different," by Helen H. Johnson in *Young Children* (September, 1994). The article is about a teacher in South Hadley, Massachusetts who spent the spring working with four-year-olds on the human body. She had the children construct a model of the different systems in the body. Her approach fascinated me, and I added this topic to my list in January. The topic could include interests in doctors, nurses, dentists, nutrition (food and restaurants), as well as our bodies, sickness, and dental health. From the questionnaires that the students returned, there was certainly overwhelming support for studying these areas. I had found a broad topic that both the children and I were interested in exploring.

### Using Knowledge of Child Development

I was not surprised that the children chose to explore the human body. Young children are naturally interested in themselves, their bodies, and how they work. From my knowledge of child development, I knew this topic was appropriate if approached as a hands-on learning experience, and, with what I learned from the article in *Young Children*, I knew it could be explored by children even younger than five. I spent the month of January collecting materials and figuring out how to set it all up. I asked friends for their suggestions, checked out the library for resources, sent a letter home asking parents for resources, and generally brainstormed all the possible ways to make this a hands-on learning experience. I called Helen Johnson, the author of the article in *Young Children*, and we talked about teaching this theme. Her suggestion was to use my knowledge of child development to help children answer the questions they had about their own bodies. We talked about how she handled questions concerning the reproductive system. She greatly encouraged me to experiment with my own ideas and follow the children's leads. I knew I first needed to find out what the children already knew and what questions they had. I sent home these questions for the parents to discuss and record for their children. Both their knowledge and the questions they had were shared in class.

### Looking at the Standards

I collected the resources and organized the materials to make sure all the areas that I needed to teach the children were addressed within this broad theme. The first area I looked at was language arts: reading and writing. Instantly, I thought of having the children keep inquiry journals for taking notes and recording additional questions. I looked for predictable books that related to our theme and that were easy for the children to read. I collected a large list of songs and enlarged the print which would help the children practice reading as we learned to sing each song. I also expected the children would want to make signs for the dramatic play areas, menus for the restaurants, shopping lists for the grocery store, and name lists for the bank. They could write stories to go with our study and books to explain what happens in a hospital, restaurant, or grocery store.

The topic of the human body fit into the science curriculum by including measurement, heredity, cells, interdependence of life, human identity, human development, and basic functions. Students would also have opportunities to practice observation skills and scientific inquiry.

The social studies standards stress that students should learn how to ask questions, organize, record, and present information. I was confident that this was going to take place within the context of the thematic study. The standards also suggest that kindergartners learn about similarities and differences between people, how people meet basic economic wants and needs, to identify types of food used by people in different places, and suggest reasons for differences. These topics and concepts fit nicely into our restaurant, nutrition study, and trip to the grocery store that the children could help plan.

Drama, music, creative movement, and art were incorporated into our study. The housekeeping area would stay intact, but we would add a dental school and hospital area. Eventually, the block area would become the grocery store, and our snack table would be a restaurant. We would talk about the roles of the workers in these areas so the children would know how to act in these roles in the play areas. Music is an important part of everything we do in our classroom. We always have songs we sing, and this would be no exception. Many of the songs about the human body lend themselves to movement and dance. Children would experience a variety of art media in the construction of body models.

### Doing Our Study

I felt like my initial planning balanced the three major areas for developmentally appropriate curriculum development: interests of the children and the teacher, knowledge of child development and learning, and the community norms and expectations (which included standards).

We discussed how we could learn more about our bodies and answer the questions we all had. We decided to invite some guests to our class: a dentist, several nurses, and the paramedics with their ambulance. We began to explore the books and take notes in our inquiry journals. The journals were used to write notes after the speakers left. One highlight was when our school nurse brought in some real organs from a nearby slaughter house. We got to touch and see a real heart, lungs, eyeballs, kidney, and livers from cows and pigs. After each guest talked, we would pull out our original questions and see if they had been answered.

We set up a dental school in our room. Students could pay a quarter (which they made out of paper and a money stamp) to work in the dental school on a set of plaster teeth that the dentist left us. We also set up a hospital complete with a nursery, operating room, and reception center. After that, we had a grocery store, restaurant, and bank. The children could earn a pay check by doing their "work" in their nutrition booklets (which focused on the food groups), take the check to the bank, and receive real money. They used the real money to go to the restaurant where a snack relating to the food group we were studying that day was served. At the end of the day, we counted up the money to make sure it was all there.

I showed the children the sample of the body model that I had made and asked if they wished to make one of themselves. Following the general directions from the article in *Young Children,* each child made a model of the body using a paper bag for the central body; cardboard pieces for head, arms, legs; string for the brain; a balloon for the heart; a plastic, sandwich bag with paper scraps for the stomach; and red and blue yarn for the circulatory system. After talking with other teachers and the principal, I decided not to do the reproductive system that year. The making of the models was very time and labor intensive, and we were lucky to have some college students and parents to assist us.

### Sharing What We Had Learned

I asked the children if they would like to make a presentation for their parents about what we had learned. I told them it would mean spending lots of time writing a script, learning to read it, rehearsing our songs, and practicing. They all agreed it would be worth it. The children dictated their parts: Maria talked about her grandmother who told us about the heart; Lauren talked about how we made the skeleton; Sherry shared how we set up the hospital; Jim told about our study of teeth; and Amanda talked about how to keep the body healthy. We alternated readings with songs.

I was so impressed with how seriously the children took this production and how well they did the evening of the production. We had covered a wealth of topics and were able to go in-depth and really learn about our bodies. We had all learned so much about our bodies and each other.

# FOCUSED INQUIRY STUDIES

"Curriculum as inquiry is not something that happens from one o'clock to three o'clock in the afternoon in a school. It is not a clever device for integrating curriculum through themes. Nor is it a skill we can teach by doing a unit on the experimental method in science. Curriculum as inquiry is a philosophy, a way to view education holistically. Inquiry is education; education is inquiry" (Short, Harste and Burke, 1996, p. 51).

Curriculum as inquiry is a far more expansive concept than the discussion here. This section touches upon focused inquiry studies, a small unit of curriculum. Dr. Carolyn Burke created a planning-to-plan framework to assist teachers in thinking through a focused study.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Focused Study** | Can be any topic of personal and social interest. Focused studies sometimes reflect curriculum mandates, the talents and interests of a particular individual, or a compelling current event. Examples: earthquakes, systems, discovery, Indiana. |
| **Possible Insights, Outcomes, and Questions** | A listing of insights from key disciplines which this focused study affords. Can be posed as a series of focusing questions which capture key dimensions of the study from the perspective of various knowledge systems and sign systems. |
| **Initiating Events** | Engagements which help each participant identify their relationship to the theme in terms of their own personal experience. Initiating events should support wandering and wondering as well as the development of voice and observation. Examples: text sets, books, and toy sets. |
| **Devices for Organizing and Sharing** | Ways to preserve relationships being explored and to share what is being learned. Should reflect research tools and methods of key knowledge systems. Examples: time lines, portfolios, sociograms, scatter plots, etc. |
| **Invitations** | Opportunities to explore key dimensions of the focused study using a variety of sign systems and texts. Should involve systematic doing. |
| **Culminating Experiences** | Engagements which help participants reflect on experiences and make plans for future engagements. Examples: learning logs, exit slips, reflection journals. |

(Source: K. Short, Harste J., & Burke C. (1996). *Creating Classrooms for Authors and Inquirers*, p. 359. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. Reprinted by permission.)

Focused inquiry studies begin with life experience and prior knowledge. What do the children already know? What common experience do they have? In what are they interested? Teachers pay attention to children's questions, strengths, needs, and interests in planning a focused study.

After the initial topic or topics are identified, there is a period of wandering and wondering when children take time to find questions for their inquiry through observation, conversation, and selection. While the entire classroom community shares the responsibility for contributing resources for the study, the teacher may need to help children identify and locate appropriate resources and to help them clarify and refine their questions.

The children research their defined questions from a variety of perspectives. This involves the sharing of ideas between children and linking research to a variety of knowledge systems and sign systems. Knowledge systems are perspectives that inquirers might take in exploring a topic of interest to them (Short, Harste & Burke, 1996). "Historians are interested in how the past might inform the present and future. Ecologists are interested in how what we do affects the balance of nature. By rotating our questions through the knowledge systems we gain new insights. In our curricular model, knowledge systems become research perspectives used by inquirers rather than dead bodies of knowledge that must be mastered. Language, art, music, drama, mathematics, and movement are sign systems. They represent ways humans have learned to mediate the world in an attempt to make and share meaning . . . Knowledge systems and sign systems become tools that inquirers flexibly use in collaboration with others to explore, share, and make meaning" (Short, Harste & Burke, 1996, p. 50-51).

The teacher may help arrange field trips, interviews, surveys, and guest speakers to provide alternative perspectives on the various topics. Information is collected, and students begin to organize it into an initial format. Students share information through written notes, photographs, demonstrations, and experiments, and seek feedback from fellow classmates. There is a celebration of learning which might be a play, a written piece, a song, or a piece of artwork. This can take place with peers, families, and community members. Students reflect on their learning and discuss new questions which emerged from the focused study. Reflection and self assessment are ongoing parts of the process, as well as, the teacher's assessment of individual and class learning.

Focused study questions can be developed by individual children or evolve out of group discussions. The entire class can work on one broad topic, or each child can explore a different topic. It may take some time to help younger children understand the concept of exploring a question. In the following story, a first grade teacher and a fifth grade teacher invite their students to work together on focused studies.

**Teacher Story**

# AN EXPERIENCE WITH FOCUSED STUDIES: LINKING 1ST AND 5TH GRADERS

*Cindy Creek*
*Rogers Elementary, Bloomington*

*"It's pretty fun because I didn't have to do it all by myself."*

We embarked on our adventure with inquiry focused studies in early February. The fifth grade class had completed some successful inquiry focused studies and suggested that we try one with my first graders. While our two classes had been meeting once a week, we worked on unconnected activities. This seemed an enticing enterprise.

The first step we took was to use two of our sessions together to give the students an opportunity to look through a variety of books that would expose them to possible topics for exploration. We asked them to keep a list of the topics that generated a lot of interest. The fifth graders assisted the first graders in locating books and, more importantly, initiated conversations that would spur their interest. During the second session, we asked the first graders to narrow their list of topics/questions down to three choices. Meanwhile, the fifth graders circulated and began to explore which of the first graders' choices matched up with their own interests. The dynamics established in previous encounters (including those outside of the classroom) came into play when everyone was deciding who was going to work with whom. The pairings of first and fifth graders came very naturally and without teacher direction.

At the beginning of the third session, the fifth graders explained to the first graders some of the initial steps in an inquiry focused study. We discovered peer discussions were more beneficial than large group discussions. Each group made a graffiti board on a large piece of butcher paper with their topic written in the middle and what they believed they knew about the topic written all around the rest of the paper. Then, all of the students took turns writing on each other's graffiti boards. There was quite an infusion of energy with all the knowledge being shared. This was very powerful to watch.

During the next visit, the fifth graders helped the first graders compile their research logs. The fifth graders gently guided them through this process and opened their eyes to the print rich world. This gave the fifth graders the opportunity to practice the art of verbalizing directions in sequence so the first graders could understand the big picture.

From this point, the pairs took off. Some groups chose to gather more books; some preferred note taking; and others wanted to take more time to talk. We planned a joint field trip to the public library where they would have access to more resources. This was also an opportunity to make sure everyone had a library card and an authentic way for the fifth graders to hone their library skills. Our very cooperative public librarian gathered some books on the topics ahead of time and talked with the students in a large group about doing good research. During our two hours at the library, everyone was truly absorbed in their research.

Over the next two to three weeks, we continued our research. Our job as teachers was to be observers and help to formulate the kinds of questions that would stretch our students' thinking. After these couple of weeks, the first graders were especially anxious to begin their project/invitation work. We wanted the students to view their projects as invitations to share their learning. This hands-on work time allowed their creative juices to flow. Many of the fifth graders preferred projects similar to ones they had done in the past. However, some of the first graders expanded these ideas and proposed things that the fifth graders had not thought of including songs, puppet shows, costumes, and cooking.

The pairs worked together for about five weeks on these projects and invitations. Some pairs naturally extended their work into more invitations, while others needed gentle nudges to stay on task. We organized a parent evening to share all of the hard work and genuine learning that went on during this study. All of the students set up their invitations and graffiti boards, and an overwhelming percentage of parents came to celebrate all the learning.

To bring the focused studies to a conclusion, we thought it would be important to have a written product that could be shared by everyone. Each pair was responsible for a written report, illustrations, and, if appropriate, a world map showing the location of their topic. All of these reports were put into a book, and each student received a copy. The book also included a letter from both teachers describing the study and the learning skills the first and fifth grade students gained from this experience.

**Reflections on the Focused Studies experience and ideas to incorporate in the future:**

- Begin the year with conversations about what makes a literate community.
- Start the "buddy" focused study during the first semester. It should not last more than a month and a half.
- Meet more often than once a week. Different groups of students could meet at different times during the week instead of always trying to meet at the same time.
- Incorporate more field trips; these seem to be memorable experiences for all.
- Videotape as much as possible.
- Document student growth by saving work samples from the beginning of the year and continue all the way through the process.
- Keep parents as informed as possible at all stages of the focused studies. Make them aware of what their children are learning and gaining from the experience.

# A CONVERSATION WITH JERRY HARSTE

## *Indiana University School of Education Alumni Association*

(Original article printed in *Chalkboard*, Fall/Winter, 1997-1998,
by Indiana University School of Education Alumni Association. Reprinted by permission.)

Jerome Harste, professor of language education, was recently named the first Martha Lea and Bill Armstrong Chair in Teacher Education. His 10 year study - with Carolyn Burke, professor of education at IU Bloomington, and Virginia Woodward, professor emeritus at IU Bloomington - broke pioneering ground and received the David H. Russell Research Award, for outstanding contributions to the teaching of English, from the National Council of Teachers of English. His other awards include the International Reading Association's Distinguished Service Award and membership in the International Reading Association's Reading Hall of Fame.

Harste's areas of expertise are sociopsycholinguistics, social semiotics, reading comprehension, reading teacher education, and early literacy. He teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses in reading and language arts. Harste's work in literacy has extended across disciplines into theories of semiotics and psychology. IU now boasts of having the largest number of interdisciplinary researchers interested in language and literacy at any single university in North America. Harste and Christine Leland, associate professor of education at IUPUI, and a group of public school teachers in Indianapolis have created a new public school in the city, called the Center for Inquiry. The school, which has 150 students, shares space with Public School 92. The center's goal is to explore multiple ways of knowing and inquiry-based learning in a multi-age holistic setting.

**CB: You were chosen for the Martha Lea and Bill Armstrong Chair in part because of the work you have been doing in teacher education reform, particularly through your work with the Center for Inquiry. Tell us about this new school.**

**Harste:** The philosophy underlying the school is fairly innovative. The curriculum, instead of being organized around content areas, was organized around the inquiry questions. And we were using content areas, like this: What would a biologist want to know about this topic or what would an ecologist want to know? We wanted to help kids understand that these content areas were not just something to leave behind when they had finished that class.

In addition, we expanded the notion of literacy. Literacy was any time we mediated our learning through sign systems of any sort. It was more than just reading and writing. It was art and music and dance and movement. Our notions were somewhat democratic because we were assuming that if we expanded our notions of literacy we could also include more kids who had not been doing well in school.

**CB: How did the school become integrated with the School of Education program at IUPUI?**

**Harste:** Once we had the school running for a couple years, Chris Leland, who had joined the IUPUI faculty, and I went to Barbara Wilcox, executive associate dean- Indianapolis, and asked if we could work with a cohort of students at the School of Education at IUPUI. We wanted to take responsibility for working with them, so that the teacher education program would also have an inquiry-based philosophy. Over the last two years, we've worked with that first cohort of undergraduates in the Center for Inquiry. They've all just graduated.

**CB: Do you think they are different because of their experience at the center?**

**Harste:** I think they are the strongest teachers I've ever produced in my life. I didn't think you could produce undergraduates who are that theoretically strong. That had only happened to me with doctoral students before. I think that two-year, face-to-face interaction on site, moving back and forth from classroom to theory, is what has really made the difference.

**CB: How does an inquiry approach change the way teachers teach?**

**Harste:** This isn't just a set of methods. This is a philosophy, a way of looking at education as inquiry. What we're doing in the classroom is supporting kids' inquiry, but we're also looking at teaching as inquiry. When problems come up, how can we research it? A strong dimension of our program is that teachers form themselves into study groups that constitute their professional development component. They are studying topics that interest them. One of the problems we've faced is that the kind of community we've created has not mirrored the kind of community that gets talked about in the literature. The question is, why can't we get this other kind of community. Ours seems much rougher, much more urban. It's not this tidy little community that always chants and sings and plays together. So that's become an ongoing study.

**CB: Do you have any insights yet into this particular problem?**

**Harste:** I just think that we don't know enough about the community as we need to, to be effective. And I also think the term community needs to be problemetized. Right now it has a very positive gloss. There's sort of a double-edged sword to community. The minute you have a community of people thinking alike, you have people who feel left on the outside.

**CB: Is the school a success from the perspective of the Indianapolis Public Schools?**

**Harste:** From their perspective, they are interested in test scores, as disgusting as that sounds. But what happened is that the kids in our school scored 20 points higher on ISTEP [Indiana Standardized Testing for Educational Progress] compared to other kids matched for socioeconomic factors and race. So all of a sudden the central administration became interested in our program because it was working. The net result of that is that IPS has now approved that we can add to the Center for Inquiry a middle school over the next three years. And they also asked to start working with another staff to create something like the Center for Inquiry in other places in the city. We are just now starting another cohort, so we will have one at School 92 and now one at School 42.

**CB: What is happening nationally?**

**Harste:** This notion of education as inquiry is something I've talked about nationally as a model for rethinking public education. The net result is that we now have three other Centers for Inquiry across the country - a group of teachers in South Carolina have started their own Center for Inquiry, another group in Utah, and a group in Hawaii. Chris Leland and I wrote a grant to the Spencer Foundation last year to connect all those facilities up through electronic mail. So in each setting there are teachers studying topics of concern to them and, if their topics coincide with the topics of other teachers, they interact through e-mail. And we produce a newsletter and also use teleconferencing to allow face-to-face interactions. At the International Reading Association this last year, the South Carolina, Hawaii, and Indiana groups put on a whole-day institute on education as inquiry.

There are lots of teachers around the country who are exploring education as inquiry in their own classrooms and they would like to be a part of this cyberspace inquiry school we've got going. So there's a group in Minnesota and a group in Tucson, Arizona, and a group in Toronto who have begun this sort of virtual reality inquiry school. For example, one of the teachers in Minnesota talked about how she called all the kids in her third-grade classroom and asked them what they wanted to learn about and a lot of them said nature and animals. So, yesterday, on the first day of school, she took them for a hike into a swamp.

**CB: What about your own writing for children? You have published *It Didn't Frighten Me* and *My Icky Picky Sister*. Are you going to write more?**

**Harste:** I keep threatening to. Actually, those were also generated by research. I was looking at how literacy develops and what are factors that make reading easy and what are factors that make reading hard. Based on that sort of intellectual basis, I decided to write these. *It Didn't Frighten Me* has now come out in Portuguese and Spanish. I never really made a cent on it. I sold the whole manuscript for $200 and when I checked a while ago, maybe 10 years ago, it had sold more than 250,000 copies. Fifteen years later, it's still selling. I keep thinking that when I retire I'll do more with children's books. My wife has started her own children's publishing business. I don't know if she would publish my work. She'd probably reject it just on moral grounds.

**CB: Anything you would like to add?**

**Harste:** I'd like to say that the reason I keep working in schools is that I'm really an advocate of public school reform. I think Hoosiers should be very careful about what they ask for because I think there are a lot of forces out there intent on destroying public education. I think the answer is to put knowledgeable people in classrooms. We need to invest in professional development, and we need to invest in our teachers.

# THE PROJECT APPROACH

*Dr. Lilian G. Katz*
*University of Illinois and Director of the ERIC Clearinghouse*

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A project is an in-depth investigation of a topic worth learning more about. The study is undertaken by a small group of children within a class, by a whole class, or occasionally by an individual child. The key feature of a project is that it is a research effort focused on finding answers to questions about a topic posed by children, the teacher, or both. Rather than simply seeking right answers, the goal of a project is to learn more about a topic.

### The Place of Project Work

The project approach should be seen as complementary to the more informal parts of the early childhood curriculum. Project work is not a separate subject; it provides contexts for applying specific skills learned in other parts of the curriculum. Nor is project work an "add on" to the basics; it is integral to all the other work included in the curriculum.

Project work encourages children to take initiative, assume responsibility, make decisions and choices, and pursue their own interests.

### Themes, Units, and Projects

Both themes and units have an important place in the early childhood curriculum. However, they are not substitutes for projects, in which children ask questions that guide the investigation and make decisions about the work that will be undertaken.

Unlike themes and units, the topic of a project is a real phenomenon that children can investigate directly rather than mainly through books. Project topics draw children's attention to questions: How do things work? What do people do? What tools do people use? What goes on behind the scenes?

### Project Work Activities

Depending on the ages and skills of the children, the activities they engage in during a project include drawing, writing, reading, recording observations, and interviewing experts. The information gathered is summarized and represented in the form of graphs, charts, diagrams, paintings, drawings, murals, models and other constructions, and reports to peers and parents. With young children, an important component of a project is dramatic play, in which children express their new knowledge and use their new vocabulary.

Project work in the early childhood curriculum provides children with a context for applying the skills they learn in the more formal parts of the curriculum. It also supports children's natural impulse to investigate the work around them.

### A Project's Phases

In *Phase 1* of a project, Getting Started, children and the teacher devote several discussions to selecting and refining the topic to be investigated. Several criteria can be considered in selecting topics.

First, the topic should be closely related to children's everyday experience. At least a few of the children should have enough familiarity with the topic to be able to raise relevant questions about it. Second, the topic should allow the integration of a range of subject areas, such as science, social studies, and language arts, as well as basic literacy and numeracy skills. Third, the topic should be rich enough to be explored for at least a week. Fourth, the topic should be one that is more suitable for examination in school than at home—for example, an investigation of local insects, rather than a study of local festivals.

Once the topic has been selected, teachers usually begin by making a web, or concept map, based on group discussion. Then the teacher and children propose the questions they will seek to answer. During this phase, children also recall and share their own experiences related to the topic.

*Phase 2*, Fieldwork, includes trips to explore sites, objects, or events. In this phase, which is the heart of project work, children are collecting data, investigating, making observations, constructing models, recording findings, making predictions, and discussing and dramatizing their new knowledge.

*Phase 3*, Culminating and Debriefing Events, includes preparing and presenting reports of results in the form of displays, discussions, dramatic presentations, or guided tours of children's constructions.

### Projects on Everyday Objects

One example of an investigation of an everyday object is a project called "All About Balls." A kindergarten teacher asked the children to collect as many old balls as they could from home, friends, relatives, and others. She developed a web by asking what the children might like to know about the balls.

Children collected 31 different kinds of balls, including a gumball, a cotton ball, a globe of the earth, and a football. Comparing the balls led to a discussion of the concepts of sphere, hemisphere, and cone. Then the children formed small groups to examine specific questions. One group studied the surface texture of each ball and made rubbings to represent their findings; another measured the circumference of each ball with a piece of string; and a third tried to determine what each ball was made of.

After each group displayed and reported its findings, the class made and tested predictions about the balls. The children asked which balls would be the heaviest and which the lightest, how the weight of the balls was related to their circumference, which balls would roll the farthest on grass and gravel, and which balls would bounce the highest. As children tested their predictions, the teacher helped them explore concepts such as weight, circumference, and resistance.

Following this hands-on investigation, children engaged in a discussion about ball games. They discussed which balls were struck by bats, clubs, mallets, hands, feet, racquets, and so forth.

### Rich Opportunities for Learning

A project on a topic of real interest to children, such as "All About Balls," involves them in a wide variety of tasks: drawing, measuring, writing, reading, listening, and discussing. From engaging in a project, children learn a rich new vocabulary as their knowledge of a familiar object deepens and expands.

# INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT APPROACH

Teacher Story

*Candy Ganzel*
*Cherry Tree Elementary, Carmel*

**Introduction**

Kindergarten students enter our classroom at various levels of academic ability and social skills. I began to realize that having students sitting in desks, completing worksheets, and only learning through whole group activities did not address the needs of all. My challenge was to provide a kindergarten program that would be developmentally appropriate for all students and include lifelong learning skills and child choice.

I began the process by defining areas of concern. I wanted to tap into the interests of the children in my classroom, as well as my own interests. My goal was to have the children come to school excited at the prospect of creating something new and exciting. I also wanted the ability to explore topics more thoroughly without having to worry about hurrying onto the next unit.

I realized to accomplish this I had to research current information. I read *Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach* (1989) written by Dr. Sylvia Chard and Dr. Lilian Katz. Both have studied in Reggio Emilia, Italy. I knew this approach is what I wanted to use to facilitate my children's learning. I attended a week long workshop given by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, presented by Dr. Katz and Dr. Chard. At this point, I knew the "Project Approach" was the right way for me to facilitate the needs of my kindergarten students.

The success of the "Project Approach" at Cherry Tree Elementary is due to the encouragement and support I receive from my building principal, Don Setterlof, and my classroom assistant, Jan Stuglik. I am fortunate to have a building principal who encourages the teaching staff in our building to participate in and implement innovative teaching strategies. Also, Jan has been instrumental in working closely with me in developing and implementing the day-to-day activities of the program.

# SHOES, SHOES, SHOES - A PROJECT

*Candy Ganzel and Jan Stuglik*
*Cherry Tree Elementary, Carmel*

When planning for this project, we wanted a topic that would be of interest to the children and one that was manageable for us. Access to resources was a consideration, especially when it came to doing our field work. We brainstormed topic ideas and discussed where the field work could be conducted. During this process, we received a magazine that listed resources and a bibliography for projects concerning shoes. This seemed to us like a topic in which the children would have much first-hand knowledge.

Preliminary planning led us to brainstorm and web our ideas. From the web we constructed, we identified subject areas which would lend themselves to this project. With each idea, we considered what type of field work could be conducted. We decided that a shoe store would be the most feasible for our project. We chose a local shoe store and discussed the field work we wanted to conduct with the manager. At first, he was not too keen on the idea. After several conversations with him and his staff, he finally agreed to let us do our field work in his store. While these conversations were taking place, we had started the project with the children.

### Phase I

The very first thing that we did, without any introduction, was to put shoes in the housekeeping corner of the classroom. We wanted to facilitate child discovery. It was several days before the children found the shoes. When they did, they began trying them on and asking why they were there. At this point, we, as facilitators, asked questions in return.

When most of the children had become aware that there were shoes in the housekeeping corner, we began some whole group discussions. As a class, we discussed where the children had bought their shoes, what types of shoes could be bought, and the different parts of the shoe. This led to our first activity: drawing our own shoe from several angles. During this activity, the children used only pencils and were encouraged to draw their shoe in great detail.

To further learning, we played the shoe game (a favorite of the children). Each child had to take off one shoe and place it in a large trash bag. In order for the child to get his shoe back, he had to describe the missing shoe. The children found out quickly that they could not give only one or two attributes, as there were many similar shoes in the class. This activity led to a discussion of the many types of shoes different people wear. We sent a graph home for the children to record how many different kinds of shoes were owned by their family. When the graphs were returned, the children used snap cubes and made a stack equal to the number of each different type of shoe. We placed the stacks in the hallway from the least to the greatest type.

We then began to discuss our experiences in shoe stores. This started out simply with the teacher talking about buying a pair of shoes. The children had many stories of their own experiences. We then made a chart about "Steps To Buy Shoes." The children drew each of the steps, and they were hung up in a pictorial sequence.

Finally, we made a web with the children. From the web, the children began to formulate ideas about how their shoes were made, where they came from, and the various parts of the shoe store. The children were sure that shoes were made in the back room of the shoe store. (As facilitators, we neither approved nor negated what the children were saying.) The children began discussing the different parts of the shoe store and decided what part of the shoe store they were interested in investigating. They began asking and drafting questions about the part of the shoe store that interested them.

### Phase II

It was a gradual movement from our experiences and questions in Phase I to getting our questions answered by exploration in Phase II. The components of the shoe store the children had decided to investigate were: cash register area, storeroom, salespeople, displays, and shoe information (sizes, color, kinds, etc.). We read many factual stories about shoes to help the children gain information and discover more questions. We were now ready to visit the shoe store. Each child was responsible for at least one question. Parent helpers were very important at this point in the project. A parent was needed to assist each group on their task while doing field work. While the children waited for the manager or salesperson to talk with their group, they drew pictures of their section of the shoe store so they would have accurate pictures of what they saw to jog their memories.

After our field experience, the children met in their small groups. In their small group, the children discussed what they had learned and what they wanted to do with the information. They thought of various products they wanted to make. We then met as a whole class, and each group gave a report. As a whole group, we decided to use the information that we had obtained and turn our housekeeping corner into a shoe store. We met back in our small groups and began creating our shoe store.

The children decided what they were going to do and how they were going to do it. The teachers facilitated as was necessary by asking many open-ended questions. Some of the products the children decided to make included: cars to get to the shoe store, a bird in a cage (seen at the store), a TV (also seen at the store), informational signs, labels for the shoes in the shoe boxes, money for the cash register, shoe catalogs, a guide to selling shoes, and many, many drawings and writings.

### Phase III

As the children were completing their shoe store and products, we began thinking about a culminating event. The class decided to have a shoe show. All felt that this was the best way to demonstrate to parents what had been learned.

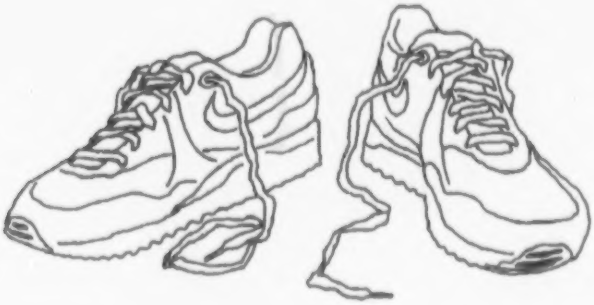
The children were asked to bring in a pair of shoes for the shoe show and were paired with a partner. They wrote a description of their partner's shoes. This could be accomplished with pictures and/or words. Because this was difficult for the children, we invited our fourth grade friends to help us one-on-one (kindergartner with fourth grader). They helped the students write (with pictures and words) the descriptions of their partner's shoes and practice what they would present.

The children invited their parents to visit the classroom shoe show and hear the stories. The children acted as tour guides through the vast amount of documentation about shoes and shoe stores displayed around the room. This was a wonderful way for the children to show off their new found knowledge.

## Conclusion

Documentation is one of the most difficult facets of the project approach, but it is well worth taking the time to complete. A phenomenal amount of information about the children is learned through documentation. A project must meet the following four criteria:

1. Be in-depth and worthy of a child's time and energy;
2. Include investigation/research over a period of time;
3. Be something real in a child's environment to which basic/social skills can be applied; and
4. Make use of the whole class or of a subgroup in investigation.



# KALEIDOSCOPE: BUILDING AN ARTS INFUSED ELEMENTARY CURRICULUM

*Dr. Jan Radford*
*Administrative Assistant for Curriculum and Instruction*
*Michigan City Area Schools, Michigan City*
*Dr. Susan Snyder*
*President-Inventive Designs for Education and the Arts*
*Dr. N. Carlotta Parr*
*Indiana Department of Education*

(Excerpt from *Project Kaleidoscope Newsletter*, 1996-1997, by Michigan City Area Schools. Reprinted by permission.)

## Introduction

Michigan City, Indiana, is a small industrial city at the base of Lake Michigan. When several of the elementary schools' test scores triggered state-funded reform, they embarked on a bold initiative to develop an arts infused curriculum that met the needs and interests of their student population. Under the direction of Jan Radford, the district was awarded a grant for a multi-layered school improvement plan encompassing four main goals:

1. To infuse the arts into language arts and math curricula;
2. To foster collaboration between classroom teachers, arts specialists, and the community;
3. To build greater multicultural connections and understanding; and
4. To use a multiple intelligences perspective to observe, teach and assess students.

Eight schools participated in the Kaleidoscope program, and Jan was soon working with Carlotta Parr, State Consultant for Fine Arts. Together they began to mold a plan. Sue Snyder was hired as facilitator for the program, and the three worked together for a year, shaping and sharing a research-based vision to facilitate the change. Here is the story of a most successful collaboration in Michigan City, told through the interwoven voices of Jan, Carlotta and Sue.

## Background

***Jan:*** For the Michigan City schools and community, probationary status served as a wake-up call that our students had been neglected. If the schools were to receive accreditation, it would take the community and school personnel working together, not only harder but smarter.

We knew we had to search further to find new instructional strategies to meet the needs of our students. In order to create meaningful learning experiences for children, we focused our ISTEP-UP efforts on an experiential, program-based, thematic, integrated arts program called Kaleidoscope. This program enabled classroom teachers to collaborate with community artists as well as art, physical education and music educators to provide first-hand experiences and integrate various art forms into the curriculum. Kaleidoscope emphasized patterning in math, observation skills, and an appreciation for individual differences through arts-related language instruction. The rationale for this program was that students would be able to learn successfully and improve their self-esteem, because teachers would incorporate the visual, performing, and musical arts. These would continue to be taught for their own intrinsic value, but also be used as teaching tools which are not restricted by language barriers and socio-economic backgrounds.

### Beginnings– The Grant Application and Approval Process

The large number of students qualifying for remediation made Michigan City Area Schools eligible for the ISTEP-UP grant dollars. The approach they elected allowed them to gain both approval and additional grant dollars.

*Jan:* Rather than propose giving our students more of the same, which obviously had not worked in the first place, we researched alternative approaches to improving students' achievement in math and language arts. We did not believe a traditional program would make a substantial impact. We knew that we needed to significantly alter the instruction we offered during the school day in order to reach our students and hook their interest. We also knew, that in order to infuse arts education into instructional practice, we would need to offer intensive professional development and substantial support to our staff.

### Staff Development

Professional development was critical to the Kaleidoscope program, since student success was contingent upon teachers' success in integrating arts into instructional practice. Teachers could not fundamentally alter the delivery of instruction without ongoing, high quality, sustained professional development that included reflections, guided practice, and support from the administration. The professional development plan was based upon the national standards for staff development (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1995). The professional development had several layers of support built in to enhance implementation and sustainability.

***Sue:*** A few main concerns were the definition of integrated learning, establishing communities of collaborators within schools, and creating an open environment for change while validating current efforts for the year. We were after a deeper understanding of arts integration than the usual "song about this" and "picture about that." Rather, we hoped to move toward deeper integration that allowed the arts to be used for their inherent value as powerful modes of communication, and unique ways to know. The arts are highly motivating, and research had led the grant writers to seek this path. Yet, implementation could not be effective until an in-depth model was on the table. We needed to delineate the differences between teaching in, about, and through the arts. We needed to understand what arts curricula entailed. And, we needed to identify links between the language arts and math curricula and the arts. Yet another goal was to look at perceptions of integration and compare them to sound theory.

***Jan*:** Beyond the traditional concept of "in-service" as staff development, the grant paid for substitute teachers, which afforded our teachers release time to plan as school teams or grade level teams with classroom and special area teachers together. As artists worked with our students or taught about art through "informances," the teachers were partners with their students learning both about the arts, and new strategies to infuse art into education. An additional level of support occurred through discussion at monthly district-wide Kaleidoscope team meetings. Representatives of each Kaleidoscope school team met to share ideas, resources, ask questions, and gain support from one another. We have been diligent in our efforts to build a sense of "we" and empower staff to make decisions that enhance all students' opportunity to learn.

The participants' reflections shed light on this complex and challenging process:

> The moment of break through for me was realizing what true integration is.
>
> (I'm) *starting to see the ways to tie in the various disciplines and work to establish links between subjects and to show the importance of the Arts with the academic areas.*
>
> It was very important to have special teachers and classroom teachers at the workshops together.
>
> *True integration - more than just "here is a topic, please do an activity." The planning it takes to do an integration* (is much more than I realized).
>
> The most exciting for me was the oral storytelling we had in my language arts classes where the leaders incorporated oral storytelling, music, mood, setting, rhythm and movement, word webbing, summarizing and retelling into the two-day lesson. The kids enjoyed it and so did I. The drama/acting really came out of some of the kids.

Karen McKenna described her reactions in an article published in the *Michigan City News-Dispatch*: For years, teachers of the arts have understood that organized, well-disciplined music, dance and art programs have residual benefits for students. However, not until the graphic evidence from recent brain/learning research was made available to the main stream public could we point to proof. What a wonderful time period to be a "special" teacher in the educational arena!

### Observations and Implications: Locally, State-Wide and Beyond

***Carlotta:*** This program has helped clarify the type of technical assistance that Departments of Education can give to support schools. While the specifics may change for each site because of personnel and local resources (artists, materials, etc.), the processes developed from this program have been defined and a design articulated. These can now be shared with other schools throughout the state or nation. The Michigan City program serves as a model for others who want to develop a true integrated curriculum.

(T)here is a dangerous belief that if the classroom teacher "integrates" the arts into the curriculum, money can be saved by eliminating the art, music, and sometimes physical education teachers. The Michigan City program provides a vision for something much different; for something much richer for the lives of students and much more educationally sound.

# SERVICE-LEARNING IN THE EARLY YEARS

**Do you want students to:**

- learn and practice problem-solving skills?
- learn practical applications of academic studies?
- feel connected to their community?
- learn they can be solutions to community problems?
- care about others and their community?

**If you answered yes, Service-Learning could be a great experience for you and your kids!**

***Elements for Effective Service-Learning***

Preparation
Action
Academic Goal
Reflection
Celebration

**Examples**

- A kindergarten and second grade project involved beautification of a city area following a flood. Students studied the blooming seasons, flowers, shrubs, and plant depths before selecting bulbs, decorative rocks, mulch, shrubs, and small trees for the area. A local landscaper spoke with the students and helped with the planting process.

- First through fifth graders were asked what could be done to improve an undeveloped area on school property. Suggestions were compiled and professional advice sought from conservationists and foresters. A plan was developed. Students and adults worked together to clear, chip, and complete a nature walking trail. Throughout the work students studied related science and ecology.

- A second grade class wrote and illustrated books for the rehabilitation center. The students' interest in the center was heightened by a friend who was developmentally disabled. The books were written at school. The project culminated with a visit and tour of the rehabilitation center. Students' skills in language arts and drawing were strengthened. They also studied different kinds of disabilities during health lessons.

- A kindergarten class talked with directors of a homeless shelter. The children talked about what they would want if they were away from their homes. Students selected and decorated canvas bags with stencils and signed the bags. With grant funds books and bears where purchased. Children sorted and counted books and bears for the canvas bags. Students delivered the bags to agencies, listened to a story about homeless people at a local library, and wrote individual stories to reflect on their project.

# SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT

*Youth Resources of Southwestern Indiana*

(Original article printed in *A Step-By-Step Guide to Community Service*, 1996, by Youth Resources of Southwestern Indiana. Reprinted by permission.)

**Grade Level:** Third and Fourth

**Curriculum Tie:** Social Studies, Young Authors, Health, Science Knowledge, Spelling, Computer, Creative Thinking

**Community Problem Addressed:** Extending the understanding of the generations

**Project Description:** The project was designed to provide a link between the senior community and students. For the grant, students visited regularly with targeted seniors to conduct life-experiencing interviews, write about and collect pictures of recent history, and write letters for and to seniors. Other activities included reading to seniors and seniors reading to students, planning parties with performances, and sharing craft work with seniors. Through this project students learned to appreciate the elderly.

For this project, student activities used writing, reading, English, spelling, and computer skills. They called upon their social studies, health, and science knowledge. The community service work established an awareness of seniors' needs and a link between generations. It also helped seniors appreciate the importance of their life experiences and diminished their isolation in the community.

**Evaluation Methods:** Students produced and bound young author books about their experiences. Students had a picnic to discuss their experiences and share with one another.

**Student Quote:** "I learned that the good ol' days were sometimes the bad ol' days. They had floods, crimes, the Great Depression, and wars, etc."

"This was a better history lesson than any book."

**Teacher Quote:** "Both students and seniors were deeply touched with their new friendships."

"No one wanted this to end. It was hard to stop at the end of each session."

"One adoption between a student's family and a senior resulted."

**School:** Hebron Elementary School
Evansville, Indiana

**Teacher:** Rosie Woodall and Linda Danheiser

# Service-Learning in the Early Childhood Classroom

*Roxanne Rowley*

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Service-learning, as defined by the National Youth Leadership Council, is a learning/teaching method that connects meaningful community service with academic learning, personal growth, and civic responsibility. According to Kromer and Hitch (1993), "Early involvement in service-learning opportunities teaches young people that they can make a difference in this world."

Many service-learning projects involve students in the middle-school grades, yet children of preschool age are eager helpmates who should not be excluded from the concept of service-learning. Our preschool program has participated in a wonderful service-learning project that pairs preschoolers with fourth-grade special education students. And our preschool class also has been involved in a service-learning project at the local public library for several years.

In Reading Buddies, the fourth-grade students, many of whom had learning disabilities, practiced how to read to young children. Special emphasis was placed on picture context clues, left-to-right orientation, and the use of expression when reading. The fourth graders assisted the younger children with many reading-related activities-simple recipes, color and shape recognition, name recognition. They also made books for the younger children. The preschool children, in turn, taught their fourth-grade friends some simple songs, dances, and sign language.

Both groups of children seemed to benefit from the interaction. The exchange between the two age groups was very positive. The older children were very kind to and considerate of the younger children, and the preschoolers looked forward to the visits from the fourth-graders. The fourth-grade teacher noticed an increasing interest in reading among her students.

The preschool children also participate in their own service-learning project at the local public library. The first year they crafted a mural, titled "Celebrate Children—Facing the Future," to help celebrate April's Month of the Young Child. The mural was on display at the entrance to the children's room. The preschool children worked cooperatively on the mural and helped with the planning and construction. Parents were informed of the project and encouraged to view the mural with their child. Having the mural displayed for a month was a great way to introduce some parents to the library. The mural featured some wonderfully unique faces designed by the preschoolers. The mural was also featured in the local paper and helped to stir interest in the Month of the Young Child.

While the mural was on display, our preschool program took a field trip to the library so everyone had a chance to view their handiwork. The children's librarian thanked the children by reading them some stories. The preschoolers were very proud of their work and enjoyed the opportunity to see how the mural looked on display. Afterward we wrote a language experience story about the field trip and posted it on the wall for future reference.

Now, each April we look forward to creating a display for the library. The preschoolers are proud participants in a wonderful, meaningful service-learning project.

## Reference

Kromer, T.P., & E.J. Hitch. 1993. *Service-learning: A beginning. "A step-by-step approach to implementing service-learning in the P-12 classroom."* (Booklet.) Mt. Pleasant, Mi: Central Michigan University.

Roxanne Rowley, MA., is the early childhood specialist for the Michigan School Readiness Program in Manistee County. Roxanne has presented workshops about Reading Buddies and other mentoring programs at several early childhood conferences in Michigan.

# CLASS ROUTINES AS PART OF THE CURRICULUM

All classrooms establish daily or regular routines that serve to bind the class together. Teachers can incorporate curriculum content into routines such as attendance, lunch count, sharing, and birthday celebrations. One way to approach daily routines is to share the responsibility of the activities with the children. This not only gives the children a feeling that this is "their" classroom but, also, teaches them responsibility. The following stories illustrate some meaningful ways that teachers infuse daily routines into the curriculum.

**Teacher Story**

## THROUGH THE EYES OF WRITERS

*Marolyn Krauss*
*Horizon Elementary, Granger*

What are the strengths, needs, and interests of each child? This is a question my class and I have pondered throughout the school year. Through the use of the message board, we have gained new insights into how children develop as writers and thinkers. Several times a week the children have an opportunity to write on the dry erase board a message that is personally important to them. The message is used as a source of daily/oral language, discussion, geography, junior editing (grammar, spelling, mechanics, punctuation), vocabulary, etc. After a message has been shared, the author's picture is taken, posted in the classroom, and later added to the author's portfolio. This has been a tremendous opportunity to focus on paragraphs, main idea, topic sentence, and supporting details.

The eight and nine-year-old learners are valued for their experience, their expertise, their knowledge, and the interests they bring to the learning environment. Topics have ranged from hobbies, collections, experiences, and trips, to letters to the class and secret messages. For example, Julie recently wrote a color coded, 75 word, secret message. Not only was every complete thought written in a different color, but certain words throughout her two paragraphs were written like this, b— and r—. The whole class had an interesting and challenging time trying to figure out the missing words. Julie's style and strategy added pizzazz and excitement to her message. She captured the undivided attention, interest, and curiosity of everyone for about 35 minutes. Through dialogue, the class asked Julie questions and requested clues until they solved the mystery. She then proceeded to pull out a concealed baton and polished rocks to share with the class. Next, Julie demonstrated particular movements and routines she had learned in baton class. Certain members of the class automatically hummed marching music in the background. For our community of learners, the message board has helped blend state standards, knowledge of child development, and student interest in a developmentally appropriate way.

*"I like message board because I can tell the class about something I did or share something I just got. I learned a lot about geography, but, best of all, I learned new words and how to spell them."*

Kara Bowman

# THE BIRTHDAY CHART AS A DEMONSTRATION WRITING LESSON

**Teacher Story**

*Denise Ogren*
*Edgewood Early Childhood Center, Ellettsville*

A child's birthday is a very special time. One of the routines in my classroom is making a birthday chart about the child. The birthday child sits in the front of the class next to the chart paper which has her name written on the top. Since the children in kindergarten are turning six years old, the classmates ask the birthday child six questions about anything they wish. The birthday child's response is written on the chart paper. Children really like that I write the name of the person who asks the question next to the answer.

If a child asks, "What is your favorite color?" and the response is, "red," then I ask the questioner, "What should I write on the chart?" At the beginning of the year many children will just say "red." I respond, "If I just write red next to number one, will we know if she likes red, or has a red car, or doesn't like red? We need to put it into a whole sentence." Eventually, I elicit the answer: "She likes red." Then I will say, "Let's count and see how many words I need to write." We all use our fingers and count one, two, three. Then I say, "What is the first word?" When the child responds, "she," then I ask, "How do I write 'she'?" We think of all the possible ways to find out how to spell 'she.' We can already have it in our heads, look for it in a book, sound it out, ask a friend, or look around the room. I usually use conventional spelling on this chart and explain to the children the irregularities in our English language. They quickly learn that the silent letter at the end of a word is "e," and that "c" and "k" make the same sound. If they leave out a letter, I will leave a space in the writing and say, "There's another letter in here that we didn't hear" and write in the missing letter. We talk about leaving a space between words and putting a period at the end of the sentence. We talk about capital letters at the beginning of sentences and when we write someone's name. We work on directions, and the children tell me what to do when I get to the end of the line. I don't work on each of these writing strategies every time but pick one or two.

The birthday chart is used to collect information about the birthday child in preparation for the birthday book. The chart is hung on the wall or sent home with the child. I type up the sentences from the chart and make a book for our class library. The birthday chart is used to help the children write their birthday papers. Each child draws a picture and writes a message to the birthday child. They may make up their own sentences or copy one from the chart. These papers are put into a book for the birthday child to take home. When we eat the birthday snack, I hold up the book and have each person read his or her page to the birthday child. The book makes a wonderful keepsake.

The birthday chart is a meaningful demonstration lesson in language arts and writing. I try to "think aloud" as I write on the chart and have the children help me figure out how to do the writing. We work together to put their words onto paper and to figure out the conventions of print and English grammar.

# ADDING MOVEMENT THROUGHOUT THE DAY

*Laurie Rodger*

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We know that movement is essential to young children's development. They move to explore, discover, and interact with the world and its myriad parts (Whitehurst, 1971). They move to develop their ability to move, strengthen muscles, and refine motor skills. But movement can also be a vehicle through which young children learn (Halverson, 1971). They can learn vocabulary and concepts, better understand stories and feelings, work out problems, and improve communication.

Movement can be added to the school day not only in blocks of time set aside for large muscle play or special movement programs but in small segments throughout the day, to enhance and deepen the learning that is going on in all areas of the classroom.

You can add movement to your day without any special equipment. You need an area free of sharp or hard structures, with a flat, smooth floor; a hand-held drum to accompany children's movement and match their rhythms; and a tape, CD, or record player with a choice of music-classical, rock, folk, rap, and ethnic. The only other necessities are your bodies, your imagination, and a willingness to try. Here are some ideas.

### Think in terms of movement

Can the concept, object, creature, or feeling you are talking or reading about be acted out? In a discussion about dreams, one four-year-old said that she had dreamed about a ghost. She couldn't find the words to describe the ghost, so I asked her to move like a ghost; she promptly "floated" eerily about the room. Everyone wanted to try ghostly movements, so as we floated we thought of words to describe ghosts.

In our class we've moved like leaves blowing in the wind, bats flying, magnets attracting metal, caterpillars wrapping themselves in cocoons, and train engines pulling many cars, among other things.

### Be flexible

Be willing to incorporate movement into other activities and to allow movement experiences to evolve spontaneously. As you listen to corn pop, try exploding into new shapes. If you've watched snow fall, try falling and landing silently as a snowflake. Spontaneous movement activities like these may last as little as 30 seconds or they may develop into mini-movement sessions of 5 to 10 minutes.

One morning, when my class was abuzz with stories of the previous night's storm, we took time to move like trees in the wind. Roots planted firmly, our branches whipped and our trunks bent as the wind blew (my sound effects). One "tree" blew down and announced that she was now a log. Because logs roll, we went on to explore ways to roll and then ways to go over logs if they are lying across a path. This mini-movement session lasted about 10 minutes.

### Go with the flow

As you become more aware of movement, you realize how often children express their feelings or help explain their ideas through movement (Whitehurst, 1971). Expand on these natural forms of expression to create movement sessions. A girl in our class was jumping with excitement as she described an upcoming vacation. Other children caught the excitement and jumped with her. I accompanied them on the drum and we spent the next five minutes exploring movements that express happiness.

In another class, I watched a four-year-old swinging his arms as he described how he could pump on the swing. To celebrate the child's new accomplishment, the teacher put on a tape of Strauss waltzes and asked the children to find ways to swing their bodies. They found ways to swing legs, arms, torsos, and heads, swinging happily until the music ended.

### Join in

If children see that you enjoy falling like a snowflake and growing like a pumpkin vine, the most reluctant risk takers might give it a whirl. Usually you follow their lead, but sometimes you will need to model a movement. Children might not understand a word until you define it with movement (Sullivan, p. 14). You might want to show how fluttering differs from flying, for example, or demonstrate a gallop, skip, or scurry.

### Observe and support

Besides joining in, you can support children verbally by noticing and commenting on some aspect of their movement, for example, "Jody, I see you found another way to spin, sitting down!" or "James, you're moving so smoothly, I think I'll try it your way."

Avoid the word *good*, which implies a right and wrong way. Children who cannot yet gallop in the standard form will gallop in their own way and can still enjoy the rhythm and energy of the gallop. Recognize their efforts: "Isa, I see that you found a way to gallop. I knew you would. Is it fun?"

There are times during a typical day when movement ideas will serve you well. Here are a few.

***Transitions***. Use movement activities to direct children to a new area or activity. Children can sneak up on their coats like a cat sneaks up on a mouse. Or walk like a robot to the circle. Or bounce to African drum music enroute to the bathroom. Ask if anyone can find a way to move to the circle without touching his feet to the floor or as though his shoes were filled with marshmallows. Or just beat a lively drum rhythm at the new gathering point and watch everyone joyfully, rhythmically gather.

***Sitting activities***. In a few quiet moments of sitting together, you can explore what hands, arms, heads, shoulders, and feet (when you're not standing on them) can do. Hands can move like rabbits, caterpillars, spiders, blowing leaves, melting ice, or waves. Arms can move softly, sharply, smoothly, quickly, or slowly. Challenge children to touch their shoulders to their ears, touch their elbows to their knees, draw circles with their chins, or clap their feet together.

***Understanding concepts.*** Give children another way to understand vocabulary and concepts through movement. Plant seeds and then be seeds, slowly sending down roots and sending up stems. When your snowman melts into a puddle, be snowmen and melt. Expand and deflate like balloons. Discover why you have bones and joints by moving like rag dolls or wooden people. Discover why you can't roll as easily as a ball or slither as easily as a snake. And you can always discover something about an animal when you try to move like one.

After examining a spider in a magnifying box, the children in my class were crawling like spiders. One girl noticed that all these "spiders" had four legs. She was not satisfied until she discovered that two people together could make an eight legged spider. They went on to create 12- and 16-legged spiders that could only move with great cooperation.

Movement and numbers go well together. Count jumps, claps, shoulder shrugs, or hops. Or experience one-to-one correspondence by jumping, changing shape, or freezing on each drum beat.

***Enhance stories***. During the telling or reading of a story, take time out to move. As I tell a favorite Norwegian folktale about the pancake man (versions available by Anita Lobel and Lorinda Cauley), we gallop like a horse, trundle like the bear, run like the wolf, and swim like the fox. And after each movement we regroup to continue the story. Read *The Mushrooms in the Rain* by Mirra Ginsberg, and move like the wet animals that approach the mushroom. Or do dog tricks like *Harry the Dirty Dog* by Gene Zion. Dance with the wild things in *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak.

Adding movement to your day brings a lighthearted spirit to everything you do and creates an atmosphere that encourages divergent thinking and individuality. In the happiest of ways, movement gives children another medium through which to understand the world and communicate their ideas. And everyone in the classroom discovers or rediscovers how much fun it is to move.

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# MINI-ECONOMY

*Glenna Myers*
*Walt Disney Elementary, Mishawaka*

**Teacher Story**

Most students in our school have heard about our mini-economy long before they actually get to third grade. They're ready to tackle economics, and everything that goes with it, as soon as they step in the door. With their enthusiasm and some great resources, our mini-economy continues to evolve and grow. There are many reasons to create a mini-economy in the classroom; some of my reasons are listed below. Many teachers have taken the basic idea and adapted it to meet their needs. I have incorporated many of their ideas into my classroom mini-economy. The *Mini-Economy: Integrating Economics into the Elementary Curriculum* (June, 1996) is published by the Indiana Department of Education and is a great resource for those just getting started. Below are some notes about our mini-economy, based on my own experience with the program.

## GETTING STARTED

- Students brainstorm and keep track of all of the things a teacher does during the day that could just as easily be done by them (week-long observations).
- List those jobs and discuss/define duties for each.
- On job applications, students list at least three jobs they would be willing to do all year. (I like having the students become experts in their jobs, but they could change jobs more frequently.)
- Hold one-on-one interviews with each student.
- "Hire" students for jobs, making adjustments in the first few weeks as needed.
- Students design classroom cash. I choose several designs for each denomination and run $1's, $5's, $10's and $20's in different colors. There are many great reproducible pages in the book mentioned above: mini-economy money, checks, savings account record, job application form, and more.
- Type checks in the amount of $20 (their salary once every two weeks), listing the student's job on the memo line. Run copies as needed. Students can earn additional funds with "bonus bucks" and by starting a classroom business.

## JOBS

The teacher should only give up the jobs he/she feels comfortable turning over to the students. We have used all of the following:

Banker
Storekeeper
Comedian
Supplies Monitor
Teacher's Assistant
Scrapbook Keeper

Bookkeeper
Postmaster
Song Leader
Centers Monitor
Computer Expert
Class Photographer

Light Monitor
Mail Monitor
Line Leader
Librarian
Chalkboard Monitor
Table Washer

Janitor/Custodian
Chair Monitor
Tote Tray Inspector
Chart Keeper
Attendance Monitor
Class Journal Recorder

Homework Monitor (keeps track of assignments for absent students)
Music Monitor (turns on CD/tape player when appropriate)
Recess Equipment Monitor
End-of-Day Announcement Monitor
Bulletin Board Expert

## PROCEDURES

- Students keep their jobs for the entire year. As new students join the class, new jobs may need to be brainstormed.
- Students receive a paycheck of $20 every two weeks. On paydays, I allow extra time for students to cash or deposit their checks. The first few weeks involve quite a bit of on-the-job training.
- Because we have a morning snack time, we opened a store where students can purchase snacks for $3-$4 classroom cash dollars, depending on the snack. All must be healthy! Students who bring snacks from home save their money. Those who don't have snacks from home can buy a snack. Our store also sells pencils and paper for students who forgot their supplies. All store supplies are donated by parents.
- Once each grading period, we have an auction. This gives students who save a chance to spend money on higher priced items. Items for auctions can include books purchased with book order points, donations of food and goods by parents or community, rewards and privileges like having lunch with the teacher or principal, computer time, free time, or flea market items. Sometimes the auctions are boisterous affairs with each trying to outbid the other. Sometimes we have silent auctions where students walk around looking at the items and write their bids on paper. The highest bidder always wins- no changing your mind once you've placed a bid.

## BUSINESSES

During the second semester, I encourage my students to become entrepreneurs and create businesses that offer goods and services that other students want or need. Prior to starting a business, we discuss these beginning questions: Do you want to provide a good or a service? What do your customers want or need? Will you be able to earn income by producing this good or service? Have you discussed your ideas with your parents and received their permission to open your business?

Once the students have decided on their product or service, they need to think about the following: What will I call my business? What do I need in order to open for business? Resources? Time? How much of my product should I make? How will I let people know about my product and interest them in buying it? What will I charge my customers? Is it a reasonable amount? Will I make a profit? Do I need to package my product?

Some of our most successful businesses begin with lots of creativity and very little money or resources. Students sometimes get hung up on making goods to sell and forget the potential for earned income from providing services. Depending on the student's abilities and willingness to work, as well as the specific needs of the class, a student may offer to organize students' folders or tote trays, carry lunch trays, or stack students' chairs at the end of the day. During our writers' workshop time, students who have special artistic abilities might offer to do some illustrations for a story. I have had students create cartoons, art work, and stationery for very little cost.

Whenever possible, I use the school's technology and resources to enable students to use their creativity for business. Our digital camera came in handy last year when a student, whose business involved taking photographs, could no longer afford to develop regular film. She used the digital camera, and we printed the photos in black and white with the AV computer and laser printer. Construction paper cutouts from the dye-cut machine are popular for students making scrapbooks and bookmarks. Some students have used computer graphics software to design note pads and calendars.

Last year, I had several students who wanted to start a business but had no resources available from home. We brainstormed together and hit upon the idea of selling the extra bookmarks, door hangers, stickers, posters, and other various items teachers receive through the mail and through book orders. I became their silent partner, their products were a big hit with the class, and their business was a financial success!

My students, this year, have opened the following businesses: *Matt and Alex's Amazing Books; Amy's Incredible Edibles, Etc.; Friendship Supplies; Corky Critters; Adam's Super Store; Pencil Wraps of America; Adam's Flubber Blubber; S & K's; and Cards, Cards, Cards!* Much to one student's surprise and delight, he made $106 on the first day he opened for business.

## LEARNING

Economic terms, record keeping, writing to persuade, and anything else that comes up is integrated into our daily learning experiences. Several students recently did a math investigation using data from our store. They charted the monthly income, average income, and drew conclusions about our spending patterns. After several weeks, the students have more insights into how economics works: when everyone has bought their product and there's no one left that wants it anymore; when it takes too long to make their product and others are making money selling homemade cookies; when it's a good time to have a 2 for 1 sale - just to name a few. They begin to see some real world connections to economics in their own community.

While the students participate the whole year in the mini-economy, I gradually add new dimensions and shift focus as we progress through the year. Early on, we work to build community as students apply for jobs and take responsibilities in the classroom. They learn early the importance of lifeskills. With paychecks, the store, and auctions, we learn to budget money and spend it wisely. I have found that the mini-economy excites and motivates students, builds community, encourages responsibility and problem solving, involves students in meaningful learning activities, integrates all the subject areas, and involves parents and the community.

## When Assessing Curriculum, Consider the Following Questions

1. Does it promote interactive learning and encourage the child's construction of knowledge?

2. Does it help achieve social, emotional, physical, and cognitive goals and promote democratic values?

3. Does it encourage development of positive feelings and dispositions toward learning while leading to acquisition of knowledge and skills?

4. Is it meaningful for these children? Is it relevant to the children's lives? Can it be made more relevant by relating it to a personal experience children have had, or can they easily gain direct experience with it?

5. Are the expectations realistic and attainable at this time, or could the children more easily and efficiently acquire the knowledge or skills later on?

6. Is it of interest to children and to the teacher?

7. Is it sensitive to and respectful of cultural and linguistic diversity? Does it expect, allow, and appreciate individual differences? Does it promote positive relationships with families?

8. Does it build on and elaborate children's current knowledge and abilities?

9. Does it lead to conceptual understanding by helping children construct their own understanding in meaningful contexts?

10. Does it facilitate integration of content areas across traditional subject-matter areas?

11. Is the information presented accurate and credible according to the recognized standards of the relevant discipline?

12. Is the content worth knowing? Can it be learned by these children efficiently and effectively now?

13. Does it encourage active learning and allow children to make meaningful choices?

14. Does it foster children's exploration and inquiry, rather than focusing on "right" answers or "right" ways to complete a task?

15. Does it promote the development of higher order abilities, such as thinking, reasoning, problem solving, and decision making?

16. Does it promote and encourage social interaction among children and adults?

## When Assessing Curriculum, Consider the Following Questions (cont)

17. Does it respect children's physiological needs for activity, sensory stimulation, fresh air, rest, hygiene, and nourishment/elimination?

18. Does it promote feelings of psychological safety, security, and belonging?

19. Does it provide experiences that promote feelings of success, competence, and enjoyment of learning?

20. Does it permit flexibility for children and teachers?

(Source: National Association for the Education of Young Children & National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education. (1990). *Guidelines for Appropriate Curriculum Content and Assessment in Programs Serving Children Ages 3 through 8: A Position Statement.* Reprinted by permission.)

> ***"In all affairs, it's a healthy thing now and then to hang a question mark on the things you have long taken for granted."***
>
> *Bertrand Russell*
> *(1872-1970)*

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# ASSESSSMENT AND EVALUATION

"Change is difficult, and changing one's stance towards assessment takes time."

Frank Serafini
(From "Stances to Assessment"
*Talking Points*, February-March, 1977)

# Assessment and Evaluation

The following chapter explores several issues relevant to the role of assessment and evaluation in early childhood education. Journal articles, teacher stories, and narratives discuss multiple ways of collecting and recording assessment data, how to collaborate with parents for the benefit of children, and how appropriate assessment and evaluation help ensure that the needs of children are met.

## I. Assessment and Evaluation

- ☐ *"On Wednesdays I Can't"* by Mimi Brodsky Chenfeld
- ☐ Introduction

## II. Observing and Recording

- ☐ Narratives
- ☐ Anecdotal Records
- ☐ Checklists
- ☐ Criteria Charts

## III. Compiling and Examining

- ☐ Developmental Continuum
- ☐ *Developmental Spellings* by Susan Neuman, Carol Copple & Sue Bredekamp
- ☐ Authentic Assessment
- ☐ Portfolios
- ☐ *A Framework for Portfolio Collection for Assessment Purposes* by Gaye Gronlund
- ☐ *A Portfolio and its Use: Developmentally Appropriate Assessment of Young Children* by Cathy Grace

## IV. Formal Testing

- ☐ Standardized Tests
- ☐ *A Reexamination of NAEYC's Position on Standardized Testing* by Sue Bredekamp & Lorraine Shepard
- ☐ *Frequently Asked Questions about ISTEP+* by the Indiana Department of Education
- ☐ *A Glossary of Measurement Terms* by Robert Linn

## V. Sharing Assessment Information

- ☐ Teacher Story: *Moving Toward Portfolios and Student-Led Conferences* by Ruth Hanna
- ☐ Conferences
- ☐ Teacher Story: *Reporting to Parents* by Barb May & Kay Cahill

## VI. Guidelines for Appropriate Assessment

- ☐ Assessment, Curriculum, and Instruction
- ☐ Guidelines for Appropriate Assessment *by Sue Bredekamp & Teresa Rosegrant*
- ☐ A Developmental Approach to Assessment of Young Children *by Lilian G. Katz*

# I. Assessment and Evaluation

## "On Wednesdays I Can't"

### *Mimi Brodsky Chenfeld*

(Original article published in *Young Children*, 50(1), 1994, p.29.
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Last Wednesday was my day with kindergartners at a nearby school. Oh, what fun to "play around" with nursery rhymes, Shel Silverstein poems, Winnie the Pooh characters, and baby animals in the oldest and most joyful of ways-song, dance, story, laughter, and improvisation. After our bouncy, active session, the last group of children were getting ready to return to their classroom and continue exploring their ideas in words and pictures.

Because many of the children were barefoot (I always invite my friends to "take off shoes and socks if you want to-you don't have to!"), the floor was strewn with kids pulling on socks, lacing or "velcroing" their tennis shoes, snapping on sandal straps. Jimmy walked over to me and asked, "Mimi, could you help me tie my shoes?"

"Sure."

As I bent down to accommodate the request, I heard his voice from above, explaining matter-of-factly, "Some days I can. Some days I can't."

That seemed like a very clear message. I immediately responded, "Me, too. Some days I can and some days I can't."

His shoes tied, I stood up. Jimmy looked at me with calm, confident eyes, and before he turned to go, he announced, "On Wednesdays I can't."

As the children waved and hugged goodbye, I slapped Jimmy an extra "high five." Thank you, Jimmy, for reminding me of what I sometimes remember and sometimes forget. Michelangelo (not the turtle) had a wonderful motto: "I am still learning." Jimmy, thanks for reinforcing that idea.

Sometimes we can and sometimes we can't. My neighbor, "the walker," walked three miles Monday. Today, he admitted, he only walked two. Maybe he didn't sleep well. Maybe it was the humidity.

Howard swims his laps in half an hour. Sometimes it takes him longer. On super days, he slashes through the water in 25 minutes.

Cara's handwriting is calligraphy. Once in a while, she scribble-scrabbles a note. "Just lazy," she explains. Len, the Muffin Man, is potty trained. Mostly. Baby brother Dylan sits up by himself. Usually. Almost always, Callie Callie Coo pronounces her new words clearly. Sometimes an interpreter is needed!

I think Jimmy had another message:

I resist narrow, limiting definitions. Don't stuff me neatly into learning-style systems. Don't think I'm totally predictable. Don't file us humans away in computer disks- we're full of surprises! Catch us on a good day. One! Two! Three! We're awake! Alert! Everything comes together. We're a symphony of synthesis. Test us then. We'll score! But don't test us on Wednesdays. On Wednesdays, we can't.

Teacher, consultant, author, Mimi Brodsky Chenfeld's poems, stories, and articles have appeared in numerous publications. Her Teaching Language Arts Creatively (2nd ed.) is widely used. The 2nd edition of her early childhood text, renamed Creative Experiences For Young Children (both by Harcourt Brace) was published in October 1994. NAEYC published a collection of her articles, called Teaching in the Key of Life in 1993. Mimi spends time with children of all ages in Central Ohio schools under the Greater Columbus Arts' Council's Artists-In-The-Schools program.

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# ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Assessment is the process of observing, recording, and otherwise documenting the work children do and how they do it. This process is a basis for a variety of educational decisions that benefit individual children and involves the collecting of data on the child's development, deciding its significance, including this information into the planning for groups and individual children, and communicating with parents (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992). Evaluation is the process of interpreting and making decisions about the information gathered. The purposes of the assessment and evaluation processes are to:

- determine a child's strengths and needs;
- help the teacher make instructional and learning goals and develop the curriculum;
- provide feedback to the child;
- help the child evaluate his own learning;
- describe the child's growth and development;
- provide the groundwork for communicating progress to the child, parents, and others;
- foster a positive self-concept in the child;
- encourage lifelong learning (Katz, 1995, 1997; Hills, 1992).

Selection of the types of assessment procedures should be determined first by the purpose of the assessment. Decisions regarding the purposes of assessment should begin with discussions among all the stakeholders—parents, educators, and other members of the community—as appropriate (Katz, 1997). The assessment methods should be age and developmentally appropriate and based on knowledge of child development and curriculum goals (Dodge, et.al., 1994).

A teacher's assessment plan should include strategies that will gather information on a broad range of children's activities. Assessment processes must focus on children in relation to what is known about developmental directions in acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions, in addition to children's individual learning strategies and attainment of specific goals and objectives (Hills, 1992). Because children develop at their own rates, their progress should be compared primarily to their own previous performance along with standards for the development of critical skills. This should be done through the use of multiple types of assessments.

Appropriate, multiple assessment formats include a range of procedures, from informal to more formal, that move from observation-type assessments through the documentation of samples of children's work. "In order to assess children accurately, assessment procedures should be ongoing, in context, and comprehensive" (Dodge, et.al., 1994, p.184).

# II. Observing and Recording

The most meaningful approach for the assessment of young children is continual observation by teachers and parents. Observation records can document what children know and can do in real-life and typical learning situations, without altering the children's behavior so as to limit their demonstration of competence. Various components or steps should be planned for an observation-based assessment. The teacher should establish a purpose for the observation, establish a focus, observe and record, compile what was recorded, reflect on the records, and decide what steps should be taken to further the child's development.

Observations can help teachers learn about their children's level of development by documenting changes that occur over time. As a result, the classroom becomes a community of researchers. As children learn to make sense of their physical and social worlds, teachers are also engaged in a process of inquiry. The systematic observing and recording can provide valid, reliable information from which teachers can alter and enrich their curriculum, instruction, and learning environment (Hills, 1992).

**Narratives:** There are many methods available for teachers to record their observations. The selection depends on the purpose and the focus of each observation, whether observing individual children or groups, and the instructional setting. Narratives are written accounts of what happens within the focus of the observations. Narrative reports by teachers outlining a child's progress are far more useful than numeric or letter grades. They provide information that can be used by parents to help their children at home. Diaries or anecdotal records of individual children, compiled and kept in chronological order, can be used by the teacher to develop a narrative progress report for parents. This form of documentation offers parents the opportunity to consider the richness and diversity of their children's cognitive, physical, and social experiences, and to celebrate often unnoticed achievements (Goldhaber & Smith, 1997).

**Anecdotal Records:** Anecdotal records are factual, cumulative notes the teacher writes while observing and/or interacting with a child. Many teachers make a concerted effort to write an anecdotal record on every child at least once a week. The observational comments are written as objectively as possible and are substantiated with actual examples.

These records can be kept and managed in a variety of ways for teacher planning and conferencing:

- a weekly anecdotal sheet with all the students on it and assembled in a loose-leaf binder
- self-sticking notes or index cards placed in folders or file boxes for each student
- a note card file
- a specialized computer program with a spreadsheet or database

The assistant, parents, visitors, and specialty teachers can also write anecdotal records on children. Diverse information will help the teacher obtain a more complete picture of the child.

## Sample of Anecdotal Record

Teacher________________ Week of ________________

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Sammy**<br>**11/15** - still unorganized, flits from one center to the next<br>**11/16** - stayed 20 mins with pattern blocks | **Betty**<br>**11/14** - asked to read story in her group ( hesitancy, self-corrected when necessary) | **Rex**<br>**11/15** - working well w/ Frankie — not just as a subordinate, but as a contributing partner! |
| **Danny**<br>**11/12** - wrote extended journal entry abt pet dog - did well with sentence form (not so many 'ands') | **Byron**<br>**11/14** - Science, worked well with Tom-not overly directive-Almost complete with experiment log, asked to draw. | **Linda**<br>**11/12** - really innovative in explaining ans. to math problem on patterning-explained to the whole group clearly. |
| **Vivian**<br>**11/13** - 2nd day in a row complained of headache before recess<br>**11/14** - Mindy is her best friend no headache today | **Frankie**<br>**11/16** - developed bar graph about pets with Rex (using computer program)—predicted which type of pet would have the longest bar after their survey | **Will**<br>**11/15** - during free play...still parallel play. Sammy asked to play with him—he refused |
| **Sue**<br>**11/13** - Completed writing project and shared with the whole class!—made it into a book w/ illustrations to put in library | **Beth**<br>**11/12** - organized her group to do a report on pets. She assigned roles and jobs. Very hard task person | **Tom**<br>**11/14** - Buddy read with Byron —Chose a book on his own and at his own level. |
| **Gabrielle**<br>Absent (14-16) ?<br>Office - reported a cold | **Charlie**<br>**11/13** - journal - noted 3 misspelled words and selfcorrected three - 2 by phonetic awareness and 1 by asking a friend | **Mindy**<br>**11/14** - began writing short story abt. her cat - Good beginning , illustrations and organization |
| **John**<br>**11/12** - absent - cold<br>**11/13** - seems lathargic and tired<br>**11/14** - better, worked on patterning | **Annie**<br>**11/15** - during math mini-lesson on patterning - volunteered 3 times! Sorted objects two different ways - color and size | **Christy**<br>**11/13** - wanders-can't seem to get on track, didn't write in journal<br>**11/15** - journal - puppy got hit by a car on Sun. |
| **Justin**<br>**11/13** - began using language to describe his pattern groups... more, less, etc | | |

## Sample of Parent Anecdotal Record

Student ______________________

Parent ______________________

Date ______________________

Thank you for visiting our classroom. While you are here you will observe your child in many situations. You may wish to take notes below on what you observe today. Feel free to share any of your observations with me to assist in my understanding of your child.

| |
|---|
| Some of the activities my child chose: |
| Some things my child did with others: |
| Some things my child did by himself/herself: |
| Some things my child did with the teacher and/or assistant: |
| Something I learned about my child that I didn't know: |

**Checklists:** Another tool available to teachers to use when recording observations of their children is a checklist of instructional objectives. Teachers need to be aware that many checklists tend to fragment the evaluation of the student by focusing on pieces of information, not the whole child. Many times the focus becomes what the child has **not** accomplished rather than reporting and building on what the child can do. "Useful checklists reflect the development of the whole child by including personal, social, and physical development, as well as all aspects of cognitive development. It is also important that the checklist show a continuum of development because children's growth and development does not proceed at fixed intervals" (Dodge, et.al., 1994, p. 197).

**Criteria Charts:** Criteria charts can be developed with the children to help students self-evaluate and set goals for their own work. The following example shows a sample criteria chart for writing in first grade. To develop the chart, the teacher begins by showing the class writing samples that show good writing. The teacher asks the students to tell what the sample shows the author knows about writing. The children's responses are entered on a criteria chart. Example:

**What We Know About Writing**
Grade One

1. Make sense when you write.
2. Use a period at the end of a sentence that tells something.
3. Leave spaces between words.
4. Use an exclamation mark when excited.
5. Use a question mark at the end of a sentence that asks something.
6. Stories have a beginning, middle, and an end.

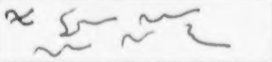
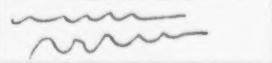
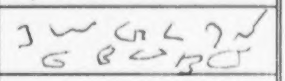
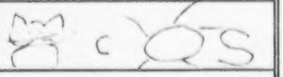
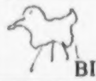
At the beginning of the year, criteria charts are interactively developed by the teacher and student after whole group mini-lessons and discussions. "Periodically, the teacher or a child can lead the group in a discussion concerning how well they are doing on these criteria as a class, and what additions or modifications of the criteria might be tried. Such discussions should be directed toward the development of positive and constructive suggestions" (Katz, 1997). Criteria charts are permanently displayed in the classroom and added to whenever the class explores a particular component. The criteria charts can be used as a measuring standard to help the students self-evaluate their portfolio components and set goals for themselves that are clear, specific, realistic, and challenging.

> *"When you listen, your students tell you what you have never heard. They help you understand what you never knew. They take you where you don't expect to go. I expected new learning from goal-setting, self-evaluation, and portfolios. What I didn't expect was for my students to use these tools to learn to be critical thinkers as well"*
>
> Jenkins, 1997

# III. Compiling and Examining

**Developmental Continuum:** A developmental continuum clusters indicators of learning behaviors. The clusters or stages of a developmental continuum help teachers follow and assess a child's growth and progress. Several developmental continua are available to assist teachers through the observation of children's progress in language arts and mathematics. A teacher's knowledge of a child's stage or phase can help him decide what to teach and when. Individual children may exhibit a range of behavior from various phases at any one time and may remain in one phase for some length of time. Every child is unique with different experiences. "The purpose of (developmental) continua is to link assessment with teaching and learning in a way that will support children and provide practical assistance for teachers" (Education Department of Western Australia, p. 3).

Collecting children's writing samples can help the teacher track the child's growth. Below is a chart describing the twelve basic steps to a child's emergent writing process.

| Stage Categories | Description | Sample |
|---|---|---|
| SCRIBBLE STAGE | Starting point may be any place on the page |  |
| DIRECTIONAL SCRIBBLE | Left to right progression (progressively downward) |  |
| SYMBOLIC/MOCK LETTERS | Can be personal or conventional |  |
| STRINGS OF LETTERS | Left to right - upper and lowercase letters mixed | e T e c o T G<br>S I U c M B |
| GROUPS OF LETTERS | Letters with spaces in between to resemble words | SVAN SO |
| LABELING PICTURES | Matching beginning sounds with letter printing |  |
| ENVIRONMENTAL PRINT | Copies letters/words from environmental print - reversals common | LOHN MOM<br>DAD |
| LETTER/WORD REPRESENTATION | Uses first letter of a word to represent entire word | I W T T<br>I went to town |
| 1ST/LAST LETTERS FOR WORD REPRESENTATION | Use of beginning and ending sounds/letters to represent entire word |  BRD<br>BIRD |
| MEDIAL LETTER SOUNDS | Hears and writes words with beginning, middle and ending letter sounds | I LIK TO GO<br>TO SKL<br>I like to go to school. |
| BEGINNING PHRASE WRITING | Using all of the above skills in constructing "phrases" to convey "story" of pictures | MY PEt dOG<br> |
| SENTENCE WRITING | Construction of words into sentence formation (upper and lowers used more correctly) | THis KAnDE<br>iS MiN <br>This candy is mine. |

(Thompson, 1997)

## Developmental Spellings

Developmental spellings, sometimes called invented spellings, are the early spellings that children produce independently. They result from children's experimentations with writing and their developing knowledge of language and its sounds.

There are some general patterns to children's spelling and writing development. Scribbling often represents children's first efforts to communicate through writing. They frequently talk while scribbling, demonstrating their understanding that symbols written on paper have meaning.

Children progress from scribbling to one-letter spelling. They frequently use the initial consonant in their name or in some other distinctive word, such as *M* for *mom*. As they continue to experiment with spelling, they add other distinctive consonants, along with other groupings of letters such as *trz* for *trees*. Vowels are usually added much later than consonants. As children work to produce developmental spellings, they are listening to the sounds in the words and increasingly learning how these sounds are written--an extremely valuable process for readers in the making.

Children eventually begin to write two and three word phrases as they develop simple rules. Again, their rules may not yet conform with our rules, but they demonstrate a growing understanding of the patterns in language.

To make good use of children's evolving spellings in their learning to read and write, keep in mind some guidelines:

- **Don't expect immediate correctness in young children's spelling.** Their spellings will become more standard as they write and read and as they learn more about spelling patterns. In the meantime, they are learning to enjoy writing and to feel they can do it on their own. By contrast, worrying about making a spelling error and feeling dependent on the adult to supply all spellings inhibits children's engagement in writing and that active listening for the sounds in words that is so useful for budding readers.

- **Look for opportunities to talk about writing.** For example, when you write a caption on a child's picture, you might ask, "What letters should I write for this picture?" or say, "You can write about your picture—what letters do you need?" (Remember never to write directly on their work but at the bottom of the page or on a separate strip). Such questions enhance children's phonemic awareness as they attempt to write down the letters that they can hear in words.

- **Encourage children to read their "writing" before you try to interpret it.** You might say, "Can you read your writing to me?" Using the term *writing* rather than *drawing* helps children begin to think of themselves as writers. If they choose not to read it, then you might point out some of the interesting features that you see in their writing.

- **Don't make developmental spelling an end in itself.** When a child asks you to spell a word for him, he shows his awareness that a "right" spelling exists—and he wants to know what it is. This is not the time to say, "What do you think?" Whenever possible write the whole word on a card. Seeing the word in its entirety, rather than hearing individual letter names being spelled aloud, helps the child form a visual picture of the word and its configuration.

(Source: Neuman S., Copple C. & Brekekamp S. (2000). *Learning to Read and Write*, p. 86. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children. Reprinted by permission.)

**Authentic Assessment:** To have meaning and significance, the assessment of children should be authentic and reflect what is actually occurring daily in the classroom. Authentic assessment gives the teacher the ability to assess more than facts and figures. "Examining what children do, what they produce, and how they do it in the natural course of classroom events is essential for teachers' and parents' understandings of how the children are doing, and how the program is serving them" (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992, p. 53).

This type of assessment indicates growth through the use of actual products with real purposes rather than contrived tasks. Students generate and apply concepts using real-life problems and evaluate these concepts by undertaking meaningful tasks. Students and teachers know ahead of time what tasks and standards are being assessed.

Students are evaluated according to the level of their performance using one of a variety of rubrics or guidelines for scoring. The results enable teachers, students, and parents to determine the student's level of understanding and serve as a benchmark or a point of reference from which to measure growth. Students develop the ability to evaluate their own work. They are asked to present to a variety of audiences, which allows them to celebrate the importance and value of their work.

**Portfolios:** There may be as many definitions of a portfolio as there are researchers and educators. Basically, the portfolio is an authentic record of the child's process of learning. The portfolio exhibits to the student, or others, her efforts or achievements in one or more areas by incorporating a representative collection of what a student perceives are her best works over time. It can also be organized to contain observation reports, checklists, work samples, records of directed assignments, interviews, and other evidence of achievement (Wortham, 1994).

The components for portfolios should be based on the purpose of the portfolio. They can be organized by content areas, by topics or themes, or by developmental areas, such as fine and gross motor, social and emotional, language and cognitive. Teachers and administrators need to establish the objectives of the portfolio program and decide the type of records and work samples that would be useful to collect to aid in reporting the child's progress. Some examples of choices include: reading logs, writing samples, learning logs, graphs, videotapes, audiotapes, text samples showing reading growth, drawings, projects, and problem solving performance tasks. Samples are routinely selected each grading period and include positive comments (verbal or written) by teachers, students, and parents. These comments help students to self-evaluate their portfolio components. The student can use these to set goals for the future.

The value of using portfolios in the classroom coincides with the purposes of assessment and evaluation listed earlier. The use of portfolios results in:

- the promotion of self-esteem,
- students retaining ownership of their work,
- ongoing assessment,
- students reflecting on their work,
- students gaining a sense of responsibility for their own learning,
- creation of a more student-centered curriculum,
- students developing increased motivation to achieve their own goals,
- students applying what they are learning to all disciplines,
- growth examination over time,
- assistance with parent conferences, and
- helping parents get involved in their children's work (Areglado, 1994).

# A FRAMEWORK FOR PORTFOLIO COLLECTION FOR ASSESSMENT PURPOSES

*Gaye Gronlund*

(Excerpt from Portfolios as an Assessment Tool: Is Collection of Work Enough?
*Young Children*, 53(3), 1997, p. 4-10. Reprinted by permission.)

Collection of children's work is not enough. Portfolios can be valuable assessment tools if four steps are involved in the process:

1. Setting up organization and storage
2. Planning for curricular goals
3. Collecting children's work with intent and purpose
4. Selecting and evaluating children's work (Dichtelmiller & Jablon, 1995)

Steps one and two need to be done before the school year begins. Steps three and four can be done in the ongoing life of the classroom and can involve the children as well. Stopping at any one point in the process or neglecting to be clear about the purposes for documentation will affect the viability of this form of assessment. Administrators and teachers need to make initial decisions as to the type of portfolio and the process involved.

Administrators and teachers also need to recognize their own learning process. Portfolio assessment involves many decisions. Learning what makes the most informative piece or which learning objectives are most easily documented takes time and practice. The teachers with whom I have worked have all reported that their second-year portfolios give more in-depth pictures of their children than do their first-year portfolios. If we were to evaluate their learning, we might use a generic scale like the one that is used to evaluate student work in the Bellingham Public Schools in Washington State (Marzano & Kendall, 1996):

Emergent — Beginning — Developing —
Capable — Strong — Exceptional

All of us who are experimenting with portfolios for assessment purposes are somewhere on this scale. As we try out the process and determine ways to make it more effective in our programs, we are moving toward being more Capable, Strong, and maybe even Exceptional in our assessment practices!

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**ERIC** Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
University of Illinois
51 Gerty Drive
Champaign, Illinois 61820-7469

Phone: (800) 583-4135
(217) 333-1386
Fax: (217) 333-3767
Email: ericeece@uiuc.edu

# The Portfolio and Its Use: Developmentally Appropriate Assessment of Young Children

*by Cathy Grace*

ERIC Digest
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1992/grace92.html

EDO-PS-92-11

The subject of children's achievement and performance in school, and even before school, has received increasing public attention during the latter 1980s and early 1990s. A general consensus for assessment reform is reflected by the volume and variety of professional literature on various methods of assessment and the number of states that are seeking alternative means to evaluate students.

Educators use the term authentic assessment to define the practice of realistic student involvement in evaluation of their own achievements. Authentic assessments are performance-based, realistic, and instructionally appropriate (Pett, 1990). One method of authentic assessment is to assemble and review a portfolio of the child's work.

The portfolio is a record of the child's process of learning: what the child has learned and how she has gone about learning; how she thinks, questions, analyzes, synthesizes, produces, creates; and how she interacts—intellectually, emotionally and socially—with others. Arter and Spandel (1991) define the portfolio as a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits to the student, or others, her efforts or achievement in one or more areas. According to Meisels and Steele (1991), portfolios enable children to participate in assessing their own work; keep track of individual children's progress; and provide a basis for evaluating the quality of individual children's overall performance. Wide use of portfolios can stimulate a shift in classroom practices and education policies toward schooling that more fully meets the range of children's developmental needs.

## COMPONENTS OF THE YOUNG CHILD'S PORTFOLIO

The portfolio can include work samples, records of various forms of systematic observation, and screening tests. Engel (1990) emphasizes that "work samples meet the need for accountability while recognizing and supporting individual progress." They keep track of a child's progress—in other words, they follow the child's success rather than his failure. Teachers and parents can follow children's progress by reviewing children's writings, drawings, logs of books read by or to them, videos or photographs of large projects, tape recordings of the children reading or dictating stories, and so forth.

During systematic observation, young children should be observed when they are playing alone, in small groups, in large groups, at various times of day and in various circumstances. Systematic observation must be objective, selective, unobtrusive, and carefully recorded (Bertrand and Cebula, 1980). Ideally, a portfolio includes observations in several or all of the following forms:

*Anecdotal records.* Anecdotal records are factual, nonjudgmental notes of children's activity (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1991). They are most useful for recording spontaneous events. They should be cumulative, revealing insights about the child's progress when they are reviewed sequentially.

*Checklist or inventory.* The checklist or inventory is one of the easiest tools for recording children's progress. It should be based on instructional objectives and the development associated with the acquisition of the skills being monitored. In general, observations should be based on regular activities, not on specially designed or contrived activities.

*Rating scales.* Rating scales are appropriately used when the behavior to be observed has several aspects or components, such as a child's success at following directions in different situations.

*Questions and requests.* One of the most effective and easiest means of gathering information is to ask direct, open-ended questions of individual children. Open-ended requests such as, "I'd like you to tell me about this," elicit samples of the child's expressive language ability. Asking children about their activities also often yields insights into why they behave as they do.

*Screening tests.* Screening tests are used to help identify the skills and strengths that children already possess, so that teachers can plan meaningful learning experiences for their students. Findings of screening tests and developmental scales should be considered with work samples and other, more subjective, material that the teacher assembles in portfolios. The assessment information revealed by such instruments is not appropriately used for grading, labeling, grouping, or retaining children.

## PORTFOLIO AUTHENTICITY

Decisions about what items to place in a portfolio should be based on the purpose of the portfolio. Without a purpose, a portfolio is just a folder of student work. The portfolio exists to make sense of children's work, to communicate about their work, and to relate the work to a larger context (Arter and Paulson, 1991; Paulson and Paulson, 1991). According to Murphy and Smith (1990), portfolios can be intended to motivate students, to promote learning through reflection and self-assessment, and to be used in evaluations of students' thinking and writing processes.

In early childhood education, portfolios should contain a statement of purpose and a wide variety of work samples, including successive drafts of work on particular projects. Children should be involved in choosing items to preserve so that they can analyze their work themselves.

## USING THE PORTFOLIO IN EVALUATION

The material in a portfolio should be organized by chronological order and category. Since all information in the portfolio is dated, arranging the work samples, interviews, checklist, inventories, screening test results, and other information should be simple. Meisels and Steele (1991) suggest further organizing the material according to curriculum area or category of development (cognitive, gross motor, fine motor, and so forth).

Once the portfolio is organized, the teacher can evaluate the child's achievements. Appropriate evaluation always compares the child's current work to her earlier work. This evaluation should indicate the child's progress toward a standard of performance that is consistent with the teacher's curriculum and appropriate developmental expectations. Portfolios are not meant to be used for comparing children to each other. They are used to document individual children's progress over time. The teacher's conclusions about a child's achievement, abilities, strengths, weaknesses, and needs should be based on the full range of that child's development, as documented by the data in the portfolio, and on the teacher's knowledge of curriculum and stages of development.

The use of portfolios to assess young children provides teachers with a built-in system for planning parent-teacher conferences. With the portfolio as the basis for discussion, the teacher and parent can review concrete examples of the child's work, rather than trying to discuss the child's progress in the abstract.

## CONCLUSION

Appropriate assessment of young children should involve the children themselves, parents, and teachers. The portfolio method promotes a shared approach to making decisions that will affect children's attitudes toward work and school in general. It frees the teacher from the constraints of standardized tests. Finally, using portfolios in assessment allows teachers to expand the classroom horizon and enlarge each child's canvas. Thus, the teacher can focus on the child and develop an intimate and enduring relationship with him.

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# IV. Formal Testing

It's "testing week." The kids are fed a good breakfast and armed with sharpened #2 pencils and encouragement. A few months later, the results are received in the form of numbers and charts. What does it all mean? First, it is important to know what kind of standardized test is being given.

## Types of Standardized Tests

A standardized test is one that is administered and scored using uniform procedures to make scores comparable from one test-taker to another. Most standardized tests fall into two primary categories: norm-referenced and criterion-referenced.

***Norm-referenced tests*** are designed to compare the performance of individual students to those of a large group of students. College entrance exams like the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and American College Test (ACT) are examples of norm-referenced testing.

***Criterion-referenced tests*** compare an individual's performance to clearly defined learning tasks or skill levels. Licensure and certification exams are usually criterion-referenced since they seek to ensure minimum levels of knowledge or competence rather than comparing test-takers to one another.

A further distinction can be made between aptitude tests and achievement tests.

***Aptitude tests*** assess individual potential and predict subsequent performance, which are affected by a wide range of different influences.

***Achievement tests*** are designed to measure learning outcomes that result from relatively standardized and specific experiences such as schooling.

Standardized tests of all types can be designed using a variety of different formats, including essays, oral exams, experiments, exhibitions, and portfolios. Multiple-choice and true/false are by far the most common formats because they are the easiest and least costly to design, administer, and score using existing technology.

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The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1987) and the National Education Goals Panel (1998) strongly recommend that group-administered, high-stakes, standardized achievement testing not be used before third grade. When such tests are used to demonstrate public accountability, a sampling method should be used (Shepard, 1994). Generally, the younger a group of children, the more variation there will be among them in terms of development. Children's writing in preschool through the early primary grades may vary from scribbling, to strings of letters, to more conventional writing with first attempts at spelling and punctuation. A child's development is individual and does not necessarily correspond with grade levels.

For very young children, the testing environment itself presents a limitation on the validity of the test. Young children will most likely demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are reliable samples of their development and learning in an environment that is familiar. They will perform most naturally when surrounded by adults they know and trust and while doing tasks with which they are most comfortable. When faced with unfamiliar people and surroundings, demand for responses to uncommon tasks, and constrictions on their usual behaviors, children may not exhibit their actual skills and abilities (NAEYC, 1992). Many test-taking skills (ability to sit still, stay quiet, work alone, and use a pencil correctly) often exceed a young child's developmental capabilities.

A standardized test may be used as one indicator of a child's knowledge and skills. "One of the major successes of early childhood special educators in recent years has been the widespread recognition of the importance of early and periodic screening for developmental, health, and learning problems. Standardized tests play a vital role in early identification of children's special needs" (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989, p.15). However, it is important to understand what test scores represent, or they may be used to draw inappropriate conclusions about individual children's strengths and weaknesses. If a student is nervous in this setting, does not feel well, is worried about a situation at home or school, or can better demonstrate his knowledge in other formats, he will often receive scores that are not consistent with his knowledge or skills. The result can be an underestimation or overestimation of a student's performance and ability.

Widespread concerns about the quality of American education have resulted in increased emphasis on test scores. Standardized, norm-referenced, achievement tests have become a staple of student evaluation. If test results come to be viewed as ends in themselves, it can lead to a curriculum that focuses too narrowly on "teaching to the test." Children's learning is compromised when they spend their days in desks filling in worksheets, rather than being engaged in active, hands-on and open-ended experiences. In addition, research (Weaver, 1994) indicates that children in active, hands-on classrooms actually do as well or better on standardized tests as children in "skill and drill" environments.

## A Reexamination of NAEYC's Position on Standardized Testing

NAEYC's Position Statement on Standardized Testing of Young Children 3 through 8 Years of Age was published in the March, 1988, *Young Children*, and a popularized version of the position is available in a brochure, *Testing of Young Children: Concerns and Cautions*. The concepts described in these publications are complex and controversial and have been misinterpreted at times.

Contrary to some interpretations, NAEYC is *not* opposed to all standardized testing of young children and the Association is strongly in favor of ongoing assessment of children's development and learning as essential for appropriate curriculum planning and individualizing instruction (NAEYC, 1984; Bredekamp, 1987). However, NAEYC applies a tough standard to the use of standardized tests—that they not only be valid and reliable measures but they be used only for the purposes for which they were designed and for which data exist to support validity and, most importantly, that standardized tests be used only to benefit children in some way. If no beneficial outcome for children can be demonstrated, then using a standardized test is not justified.

One of the major successes of early childhood special educators in recent years has been the widespread recognition of the importance of early and periodic screening for developmental, health, and learning problems. Standardized tests play a vital role in early identification of children's special needs. If a standardized test is used to screen children to determine which children are in need of further diagnosis and treatment of a potential learning or developmental handicap, then the use of a screening test is appropriate and warranted. However, if a standardized test is used to screen children for "readiness" for kindergarten and those children who are found "unready" are sent home or assigned to a special class for "less ready" children, then the use of the test fails NAEYC's standard on two counts. First, the test was used for a purpose other than that for which it was designed—admittance or placement rather than screening or instructional planning—and second, the "treatment" of being sent home or assigned to a special class has not been shown to benefit children and is actually harmful by denying access to schooling. Unfortunately, those children who are most frequently "screened" out of school or held back are those who stand to benefit most from education—children from low-income families or minority groups.

NAEYC's position on testing further requires that decisions that have major impact on children, such as enrollment, retention, or assignment to remedial or special classes, should be based on multiple sources of information and should never be based on a single test score.

(Source: Bredekamp S. & Shepard L. (1989). How Best to Protect Children From Inappropriate School Expectations, Practices, and Policies, *Young Children*, 44(3), p. 15. Washington, DC:National Association for the Education of Young Children. Reprinted by permission.)

# Frequently Asked Questions About ISTEP+

- **What is the best way for students to prepare for ISTEP+?**
  Students should continue to work toward their highest academic potential. They should stay current with their classes and with their homework. If students or their parents have concerns about student performance on ISTEP+, students, or their parents, should speak with their teachers about how best to prepare for this type of testing situation.

- **What is the best way for teachers to prepare for ISTEP+?**
  Teachers can continue to teach from their local curriculum and the state standards. Schools should provide students with broad coverage of important and meaningful content, as well as teaching them to generalize their learning to various other contexts and situations. Students also should be taught general test-taking skills.

- **What is the best way for parents to prepare their children for ISTEP+?**
  Teachers should provide parents and student with clear information about academic standards. Communicating what is expected will enable parents and students to be more active partners in the learning process. Parents should make certain to stay involved with their children's education and in contact with their child's teachers. Parents can help by talking with their children about their studies and their homework, reading aloud to them, and encouraging them to spend time reading for pleasure, serving as an example of appreciation for language arts, and showing children how to use mathematics in everyday life. In addition, parents should make certain they know when ISTEP+ is administered and discuss the test with their children. These steps will help reduce any pretest anxieties.

- **How is the content of ISTEP+ determined?**
  The content of ISTEP+ is primarily determined by the Indiana Academic Standards. The Academic standards are specific learning outcomes that have been identified as necessary for students to achieve to ensure success in future grades, higher education, and the workforce. The standards were recommended to the Indiana State Board of Education for adoption by a group of educators, parents, business and community leaders, legislators, and students.

- **Who writes questions for ISTEP+?**
  The nationally norm-referenced part of the test is developed by one of the country's leading testing companies, CTB/McGraw-Hill, and has been used in Indiana for ten years. CTB/McGraw-Hill also prepared first drafts of the open-ended questions. Indiana classroom teachers and administrators then reviewed, improved, and selected the specific items to be used on the tests. In addition, all questions have been reviewed and approved by citizen review committees that were representative of Indiana communities statewide.

- **How are the tests scored?**
  The multiple-choice questions on the test are machine-scored by CTB/McGraw-Hill, as tests of this nature have been scored for many years. The open-ended questions are scored by trained scorers using previously established scoring rules. The short-answer and essay responses are scored in Indiana by college graduates who are carefully trained in how to score the tests reliably. If you have additional questions about how ISTEP+ is scored, please refer to the ISTEP+ scoring guides. Guides for scoring the English/language arts and mathematics components of ISTEP+ will be sent to every Indiana school with the 1999 ISTEP+ reports.

- **When are the scores reported?**
  Test results are provided in January of the same school year the test is administered. Written-response portions of the test will be returned to the schools to allow teachers and parents to see how students performed on these types of items. Individual student reports also are issued that show a student's scores in math and English/language arts, as well as a national percentile score that reflects how a student scored compared to national norms.

- **How is a passing grade established?**
  A minimum-performance standard – one in English/language arts and one in mathematics – is established by the Indiana State Board of

Education, based upon recommendations by a group of educators, parents, business and community leaders, legislators, and students. The standard-setting process involves several steps. First, individual teachers complete the assessment themselves and determine what the minimum performance would be to indicate an adequate knowledge of the content necessary for success at current and future grade levels. After each individual reaches a decision, the teachers work together to develop a consensus score. They then have the opportunity to adjust this score when they are introduced to the student results and can see the percentage of students who would not meet the chosen standard. Before this step in the process, the teachers do not know how many students would be affected by the arbitrated standard. Next, a national panel of experts reviews the standards. Finally, the State Board of Education adopts the minimum performance standard in mathematics and English/language arts.

(Source: Grade 3, ISTEP+ Educator's Guide 1999-2000, Indiana Department of Education.)

# A Glossary of Measurement Terms

- **Academic Standards:** Statements of what knowledge and skills students should have at specific grade levels. Indiana's academic standards for English/language arts and mathematics were adopted by the Indiana State Board of Education for ISTEP+. ISTEP+ score reports list these Academic Standards as Essential Skills.

- **Anchor paper:** An anchor paper is a student paper that is an example of a score point described on the rubric. In the applied skills sections of ISTEP+, anchor papers are used for Writing Development, Language-in-Use, and short-answer items.

- **Constructed-Response Item:** A test question/item that requires the test-taker to create his or her own response (e.g., a short-answer, essay, pictorial, or graphic response).

- **Criterion-Referenced Test:** An assessment that measures student achievement relative to specific academic standards, rather than in comparison to other students.

- **Exemplar:** An example of a model student response.

- **Item:** One of the assessment units, often posed as a question or problem, on a test.

- **Mixed Format Test:** A test that uses different types of test items that may include multiple-choice, short-answer, essay, and performance tasks.

- **Multiple-Choice Item:** A question or an incomplete statement that is followed by a set of possible answer choices, one of which is the correct answer. Multiple-choice items also are referred to as "selected-response" items.

- **Norm-Referenced Test:** An assessment that compares the performance of one test-taker with the performance of other test-takers who have taken the assessment under the same conditions.

- **Open-Ended Item:** An item designed to require students to apply their knowledge.

- **Percentile Rank:** The percentage of scores for a particular testing group that fall at or below a given student's score. For example, a student score with a percentile rank of 90 indicates that 90 percent of the student scores from the norm group are at or below that score.

- **Prompt:** The assessment task; the description of what students should include in their writing.

- **Rubric or Scoring Rubric:** A scoring tool, or a set of standard rules and criteria, used to evaluate students' responses to short-answer, essay, and performance tasks.

- **Scale Score:** Numbers, assigned to individuals on the basis of test performance, that are intended to reflect increasing levels of achievement or ability. For many educational achievement and aptitude tests, one scale score is used as the primary scale score for reporting scores. Scores on alternate test forms are typically reported on the primary scale score, and a system of equating is used to insure that primary scale scores have the same meaning regardless of the test form an examinee takes.[1]

- **Standardized Test:** A large-scale assessment with consistent procedures for administration and scoring. These standard rules for test administration ensure a comparability of scores that is essential for any norm-referenced test.

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[1] In Linn, Robert L. (Ed.). *Educational Measurement*, Third Edition. Macmillan, 1989.

(Source: Grade 3, ISTEP+ Educator's Guide 1999-2000, Indiana Department of Education.)

# V. Sharing Assessment Information

## MOVING TOWARD PORTFOLIOS AND STUDENT-LED CONFERENCES

**Teacher Story**

*Ruth Hanna*
*Central Elementary, Martinsville*

For the past four years, I have taught in a school where traditional report cards are no longer used in the primary grades. They have been replaced with portfolios and parent conferences every six weeks. As I reflect on where I was in my first year of implementing portfolios as a vehicle for assessment and evaluation, I can truly say I have come a long way. I remember the night before my first parent conference. Portfolios were spread all over my living room floor, and I was the one who was sorting and organizing the information to go inside each one. It took hours to put together all of the portfolios, and the choices were made only by me, not by my students.

I have come to learn that in order for portfolios to be effective assessment tools, students must be involved in choosing their own pieces and evaluating their own work. The use of the multiple intelligences is a necessary part of this process. Students need to be able to use their preferred modes of learning. They must also be exposed to the modes in which they are not as strong. During the course of an evaluation period, students are given choices of activities that represent the different intelligences. Pieces for their portfolios are chosen from these activities. Students in my classroom self-evaluate their pieces and set goals for the future. Together we reflect on their samples emphasizing what they do well and what they might do to make things better.

Even though my use of portfolios in my classroom had improved, I felt the need to take students one step further. They needed to be involved in the conferencing process with their parents. I decided to take the plunge and had my first student-led conference this year. Students organized their own portfolios to present and discuss with their parents. This process really amazed me. I had previously spent hours working on portfolios. My students were able to organize their own portfolios in a much more efficient manner. They came up with some great ways to organize their pieces in order to share them with their parents. Before conferences, I had wanted to practice with my students, but time got the best of us. As it turned out, practicing was not necessary. I was extremely delighted with the way conferences turned out. My students were wonderful! They were really able to explain to their parents why they were doing things and what they were learning from those experiences. I remember a boy named Jimmy discussing the progress he had made in writing with his mother. He said, "As you can see, Mom, I have made so much improvement with the writing process. I really write good stories." His statements were so much more meaningful than a grade on a report card.

What really struck me the most was the positive atmosphere created within the room during those student-led conferences. Parents were smiling, students were smiling, and I was smiling. We were so proud of what was happening. I saw my second grade students showing such new found confidence when it came to school and their own learning. At the end of the conference, an amazing thing seemed to happen. Before the students returned to the classroom, parents and students hugged each another. I couldn't have asked for a more meaningful experience!

**Conferences:** Conferences may take a variety of forms. Conversations with children should be a part of the daily activities in the school. Small group, paired, or individual conferences with the teacher help children develop the concepts of cooperative and collaborative planning and learning. Peer conferences should occur daily while children work on collaborative tasks. More formal peer conferences can occur when students share and discuss their work.

Teachers should also plan individual conference times in order to give each child an opportunity to share observational records and portfolio artifacts. During this time the teacher needs to listen to the child's observations about himself. These conferences will help to build teacher/child relationships and make the child feel his ideas and opinions are valued. This will help the teacher and the child understand their strengths, recognize where growth has occurred, and plan for the future. A conference log may be kept to record highlights and reminders.

Family involvement in the assessment process is extremely important. Portfolios and authentic assessment allow parents an opportunity to see how their child is assessed along with the actual progress throughout the year. Parent/teacher/child conferences allow children a time to show and describe the process to their parents. This allows growth for all stakeholders. Whether it is a student-led conference (student, parent, and teacher) or a parent-teacher conference, there are some important guidelines to use to prepare for conferences.

## Guidelines for Conferences

1. **Be Prepared in Advance**
   Be familiar with all relevant information about the child and the family. Collect representative samples of the child's work.
2. **Prepare the Parents**
   Send a note to the parents with the announcement of and general information about the conference. Describe the conference goals and suggest things for parents to think about before the meeting.
3. **Create an Appropriate Conference Setting**
   Set the room environment so that parents feel comfortable. Providing a low table with adult-size furniture is more comfortable for the parents than a teacher sitting behind a desk. At the conference, teachers should communicate with parents using their language rather than educational jargon. Underscore the child's positive qualities and give parents precise suggestions on how they can help their child at home.
4. **Follow-up and Follow-through After the Conference**
   Immediately after the parents' departure, record the conference. Include any suggestions that were made and questions raised. *Teachers should immediately follow up on any questions that need to be answered or any commitments they made to parents.*
5. **Provide an Evaluation Form**
   Ask for suggestions about the conference format and informal daily chats with parents.

(Bjorklund & Burger, 1987)

# REPORTING TO PARENTS

Teacher Story

*Barb May & Kay Cahill*
*Riley Elementary, Riley*

We understand our children to be developing learners who need encouragement and support as they grow into independent learners. One of the priorities, during our first year team teaching in a multi-age classroom, was to find a way to report children's strengths and learning needs to their parents. We decided to use a progress report based upon the phases of a child's development.

The report card we now use contains our philosophy statement, assessment team goals, stages of development, and a glossary explaining the developmental stages of reading, writing, oral language, and math. A list of indicators of learning behaviors at different stages of development is included. We use these during conference time as a tool to discuss each child's strengths and learning needs. The report card includes a section on classroom interactions, integrated learnings, and special subjects. It was also necessary for us to include a place for letter grades as required by our school system.

We use highlight pens to show student progress during the year. We conduct baseline assessments to help us ascertain what each child is capable of doing in August. Different colored highlighters are used each grading period to show the students' growth in learning as they move toward becoming independent readers, writers, and users of mathematics. (For example, the first grading period, the child's current learning behaviors are marked in green; those observed in the second grading period are marked in yellow, etc.) Portfolios accompany the report cards so parents have examples of work to provide a comprehensive picture of their child's learning and development.

We find highlighting the stage indicators allows us to show progress in a way that a traditional report card does not reflect. Letter grades may not change from one grading period to another leaving parents with little knowledge of the growth made when using the traditional report card. While we know a child does not work solely in one stage of learning, highlighted indicators allow the parents to see where their child is performing and the stage he or she is moving toward.

Completing forty-two report cards the first time was quite a challenge. The first one we did together took time and much discussion. As we progressed, it was interesting to see how much we both knew and understood about each student in the class. The report card is an excellent tool for planning the appropriate instruction and future goals for each individual child. It guides us so we are able to match our curriculum with the child's developmental abilities and challenges us to provide experiences so learning will take place. This type of reporting gives the parents and teachers the information they need so that, together, opportunities are designed and provided that challenge children to become lifelong independent learners.

*On the following page is a portion of the report card used by Kay and Barb.*

# READING

**PRE-EMERGENT**

Chooses to look at books.
Enjoys being read to.
Uses oral language to label and comment on pictures.
Answers simple questions about stories presented orally.
Plays at reading: "reads pictures" rather than print.
Recognizes own name in print.
Knows that print conveys meaning.

**EMERGENT**

Recognizes print in own environment (names, letters, signs, labels, logos).
Turns and looks at pages in correct sequence.
Attempts to match voice to print.
Retells stories using a book.
Memorizes text of short story.
Begins to recognize rhyming words.
Knows the difference between a letter and a word.
Predicts story from pictures.
Tracks print top to bottom and left to right.

**BEGINNING**

Sees him/her self as reader.
Finger points word for word reading.
Reads aloud slowly and intentionally.
Reads with understanding.
Enjoys rereading favorite books.
Chooses short books with simple stories and illustrations.
Knows letter names and sounds.
Begins to develop a sight word vocabulary.
Recalls sequences of events in stories.
Begins to figure out unknown words using strategies (pictures, initial sounds, meaning, story patterns).
Begins to read for recreation.
Begins to show preferences in literature.
Has beginning knowledge of authors and illustrators.
Begins to read silently.

**DEVELOPING**

Begins to self-correct miscues that disturb the flow of language or meaning.
Does not correct miscues that do not disturb meaning.
Reads on to discover an unknown word.
Uses prediction as reading strategy.
Begins to read aloud with fluency and expression.
Increases sight word vocabulary.
Reads silently.
Reads for recreation.
Reads for information.
Shows interest in topics, characters and events.
Shows increasing ability to make inferences and connect to experiences.
Begins to use reference materials.
Begins to select more challenging texts.

**EXPANDING**

Reads aloud with fluency and expression.
Increases length of time spent reading.
Self-corrects own miscues confidently and independently.
Continues to increase reading vocabulary.
Increases silent reading rate and comprehension.
Chooses a book with an intent in mind.
Scans to locate information.
Has sense of story and can identify parts of a story.
Identifies central problem in a plot.
Responds to literature in a variety of ways.
Shows increasing ability to make inferences and to read critically.
Reads longer and more demanding texts.
Begins to use and understand figurative language in print (multiple meanings, idioms, similes).
Provides synonyms or near synonyms for unknown words.
Refers back to text to support opinions and ideas.
Uses reference materials.
Gathers and organizes information from wide variety of texts and makes sense of it.

**Reporting Period**

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Final Mark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reading | | | | | |

## Assessment Team Goals

**The Ultimate Goals of the Assessment Team are:**

- the empowerment of children and parents in the learning process.
- the development of an assessment system that communicates growth across time for a child regardless of his/her development level.
- the development of an on-going assessment that communicates that child's successes to parents, educators, and the child himself/herself.
- the involvement of teacher, parent, and child in a continuous assessment process.

Sample: Pages 2, 8, and 9 of
Grade 1 and 2 multiage class,
Report to Parents
Riley Elementary, Riley, Indiana,
(Vigo County School Corporation).

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# VI. Guidelines

For young children, a variety of tools should be used to determine a child's strengths and needs. Tools and processes, such as observations, portfolios, standardized tests, and student/teacher/parent conferences, can be meaningful and benefit children and their growth but do not, by themselves, constitute assessment and evaluation. Teachers must reflect on what they have observed, recorded, and heard in relation to the program goals and objectives for each child (Hills, 1993). The ability to accurately interpret the information and integrate the assessment results with daily classroom practice are important steps in the process.

Assessment is an integral part of the curriculum and instruction. Assessment should be used in planning the instruction for individuals and groups, communicating with families, and evaluating the total program to see if it is meeting its goals. Assessment data "should be used to bring about benefits for children, such as more individualized instruction; it should not be used to recommend that children stay out of a program, be retained in a grade, or be assigned to a segregated group based on ability or developmental maturity" (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992, p. 23).

Teachers should make the purposes and learning outcomes of the assessments clear and make sure that large scale classroom level assessments are integrated. Choices in assessment alternatives that are appropriate to the students' ethnicity, their gender, the possible existence of a disability, and the language they use, must be provided. Assessment can yield useful information about what students can really do and whether they can actually apply knowledge, skills, and understanding in important, real-world contexts. It doesn't just measure performance; it enhances it (McTighe, 1997).

Based on the research (Bickart, et.al., 1997; Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992) on how young children learn, educators, administrators, school boards, and legislators must look at alternative ways to assess children's progress. In *Reaching Potentials* (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992, p. 23-24), eighteen guidelines addressing the appropriate assessment for children, ages three through eight, are outlined:

## Guidelines for Appropriate Assessment

1. Curriculum and assessment are integrated throughout the program; assessment is congruent with and relevant to the goals, objectives, and content of the program.

2. Assessment results in benefits to the child, such as needed adjustments in the curriculum or more individualized instruction and improvements in the program.

3. Children's development and learning in all domains - physical, social, emotional, and cognitive - and their dispositions and feelings are informally and routinely assessed by teachers observing children's activities and interactions, listening to them as they talk, and using their constructive errors to understand their learning.

4. Assessment involves regular and periodic observation of the child in a wide variety of circumstances that are representative of the child's behavior in the program over time.

5. Assessment provides teachers with useful information to successfully fulfill their responsibilities: to support children's learning and development, to plan for individuals and groups, and to communicate with parents.

6. Assessment relies primarily on procedures that reflect the ongoing life of the classroom and typical activities of the children. Assessment avoids approaches that place children in artificial situations, impede the usual learning and developmental experiences in the classroom, or divert children from their natural learning processes.

7. Assessment relies on demonstrated performance during real, not contrived, activities, for example, real reading and writing activities rather than only skills testing (Teals, 1988; Engle, 1990).

8. Assessment utilizes an array of tools and a variety of processes, including, but not limited to, collections of representative work by children (artwork, stories they write, tape recordings of their reading), records of systematic observations by teachers, records of conversations and interviews with children, and teachers' summaries of children's progress as individuals and as groups (Chittenden & Courtney, 1989: Goodman, Goodman, & Hood, 1989).

9. Assessment recognizes individual diversity of learners and allows for differences in styles and rates of learning. Assessment takes into consideration children's ability in English, their stage of language acquisition, and whether they have been given the time and opportunity to develop proficiency in their native language as well as in English.

10. Assessment supports children's development and learning; it does **not** threaten children's psychological safety or feelings of self-esteem.

11. Assessment supports parents' relationships with their children and does not undermine parents' confidence in their children's or their own ability, nor does it devalue the language and culture of the family.

12. Assessment demonstrates children's overall strengths and progress, what children can do, not just their wrong answers and what they cannot do or do not know.

13. Assessment is an essential component of the teacher's role. Since teachers can make maximal use of assessment results, the teacher is the primary assessor.

14. Assessment is a collaborative process involving children and teachers, teachers and parents, school and community. Information from parents about each child's experiences at home is used in planning instruction and evaluating children's learning. Information obtained from assessment is shared with parents in language they can understand.

15. Assessment encourages children to participate in self-evaluation.

16. Assessment addresses what children can do independently and what they can demonstrate with assistance since the latter shows the direction of their growth.

17. Information about each child's growth, development, and learning is systematically collected and recorded at regular intervals. Information such as samples of children's work, descriptions of their performance, and anecdotal records is used for planning instruction and communicating with parents.

18. A regular process exists for periodic information sharing between teachers and parents about children's growth and development and performance. The method of reporting to parents does not rely on letter or numerical grades but rather more meaningful, descriptive information in narrative form.

**ERIC** Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
University of Illinois
51 Gerty Drive
Champaign, Illinois 61820-7469

Phone: (800) 583-4135
(217) 333-1386
Fax: (217) 333-3767
Email: ericeece@uiuc.edu

# A Developmental Approach to Assessment of Young Children

*by Lilian G. Katz*

http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1997/katz97.html

EDO-PS-97-18

For more than a decade, early childhood educators have been discussing issues of curriculum and teaching methods in terms of their developmental appropriateness. The concept of developmental appropriateness can also be extended to issues related to the assessment of children during the early years.

## THE PURPOSES OF ASSESSMENT

Clarifying the main purpose for which young children are assessed can help determine what kinds of assessments would be most appropriate. Assessment of individual children might serve one of the following purposes:

- to determine progress on significant developmental achievements;
- to make placement or promotion decisions;
- to diagnose learning and teaching problems;
- to help in instruction and curriculum decisions;
- to serve as a basis for reporting to parents; and
- to assist a child with assessing his or her own progress.

Decisions regarding the purposes of assessment should begin with discussions among all the stakeholders—parents, educators, and other members of the community—as appropriate. The group may want to keep in mind that (1) plans, strategies, and assessment instruments are differentially suited for each of the potential purposes of assessment; (2) an overall assessment should include the four categories of educational goals: knowledge, skills, dispositions, and feelings (Katz, 1995); and (3) assessments made during children's informal work and play are most likely to minimize the many potential errors of various assessment strategies.

## THE RISKS OF ASSESSING YOUNG CHILDREN

Young children are notoriously poor test-takers: perhaps because they are sometimes confused by being asked questions that they think the tester must already know the answers to! There is reason to suggest that the younger the child being evaluated, assessed, or tested, the more errors are made (Shepard, 1994; Ratcliff, 1995). If this principle is sound, then the younger the children, the greater the risk of assigning false labels to them. Another principle may also be appropriate: the longer children live with a label (a true or false one), the more difficult it may become to discard it.

All methods of assessment make errors: the errors made by formal tests are different from those made by informal or anecdotal records and documentation notes; the errors made by specific checklists of behavioral items are different from those made by holistic impressionistic assessments. Awareness of the potential errors of each evaluation or assessment strategy can help minimize errors in interpretation. It is a good idea to strive for a balance between global or holistic evaluation and detailed specific assessments of young children.

## THE ASSESSMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN

As they plan assessments of young children's learning, parents and educators may want to:

*Recognize the Limitations of Report Cards and Grades*. For several reasons, report cards with letter grades or achievement scores are not appropriate for children at and below the third grade. First, before third grade, the differences in developmental timetables and other factors that contribute to performance are still too unstable, malleable, and varied to achieve reliability. By third grade, however, children's abilities and aptitudes are likely to have stabilized and can be assessed with at least minimal reliability. Second, there is little evidence that grades or scores listed on the report cards of young children contribute positively to those most in need of improvement. Third, while teachers need to know how well a young child is progressing on significant skills and knowledge, and to evaluate such progress, little is known about how parents use such information.

*Assess Aspects of Children's Functioning That Have Real Meaning*. The items and behaviors assessed should have demonstrable relationships to significant human functioning. For example, the child's knowledge of the names of shapes or of the calendar at age 4 or 5 has little or no practical significance or meaning beyond test performance itself. In addition to assessing young children's social competence, adults should include the assessment of individual children's progress in acquiring desirable dispositions, feelings, skills, and knowledge. Documentation is a strategy for recording and presenting such assessments (see Katz & Chard, 1996).

*Encourage Children to Assess Their Own Work*. Preschoolers and children in the primary grades can be encouraged to assess their own work according to specific criteria such as the clarity, inclusiveness, interest level, comprehensiveness, or aesthetic qualities of the work. They can also be encouraged to consider the standards to be met on these criteria.

*Encourage Children to Assess Their Own Progress*. From kindergarten on, most children can be encouraged to assess the general progress of their own learning. During teacher-child or teacher-parent-child conferences, children can be encouraged to indicate what mastery and learning they want to focus on during a given period. From time to time, children can then be asked to judge their own progress, using three or four categories. For example, each child can be asked to discuss work she thinks she is making good progress on, what he thinks he needs to concentrate more on, what she wants help with, and other categories nominated by the child. Most children will be quite realistic and sensible when engaging in such self-evaluation. The teacher can help by expressing her own realistic evaluation in a serious and supportive way. In principle, unless children are consulted about their own views of their own progress, they cannot learn to assume some responsibility for it (Katz, 1995).

*Involve Children in Evaluating the Class Community*. Depending on their ages, children as a group can be encouraged to develop some criteria concerning what they want their classroom life to be like. These criteria are not simply lists of classroom rules. Rather they should be a thoughtful examination of what kind of community the class should be—for example, the extent to which it is a caring, cooperative group, respectful of individual differences; the extent to which it is a helpful community of scholars; and the extent to which it meets any other dimensions of classroom life the children and their teacher think are important.

Periodically, the teacher or a child can lead the group in a discussion concerning how well they are doing on these criteria as a class, and what additions or modifications of the criteria might be tried. Such discussions should be directed toward the development of positive and constructive suggestions.

## CONCLUSION

Whenever a measurement is applied to a group of people of any age, especially a group that is diverse in background, experience, aptitude, development, culture, language, and interests, some will rank higher and some lower than others on any item assessed. All measures yield such differences, and it is thus statistically impossible for all those subjected to the same assessment to be above average! However, failure to evaluate and assess children's progress might mean that some children will be deprived of needed intervention with special services at a time when these services can do the most good. While educators cannot be accountable for all children being above average or for all children being first, they are accountable for applying all teaching strategies and efforts known to be effective and appropriate for the learning situation at hand. Assessment procedures should therefore indicate which of the strategies and resources available and judged appropriate have been employed to help each individual child.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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